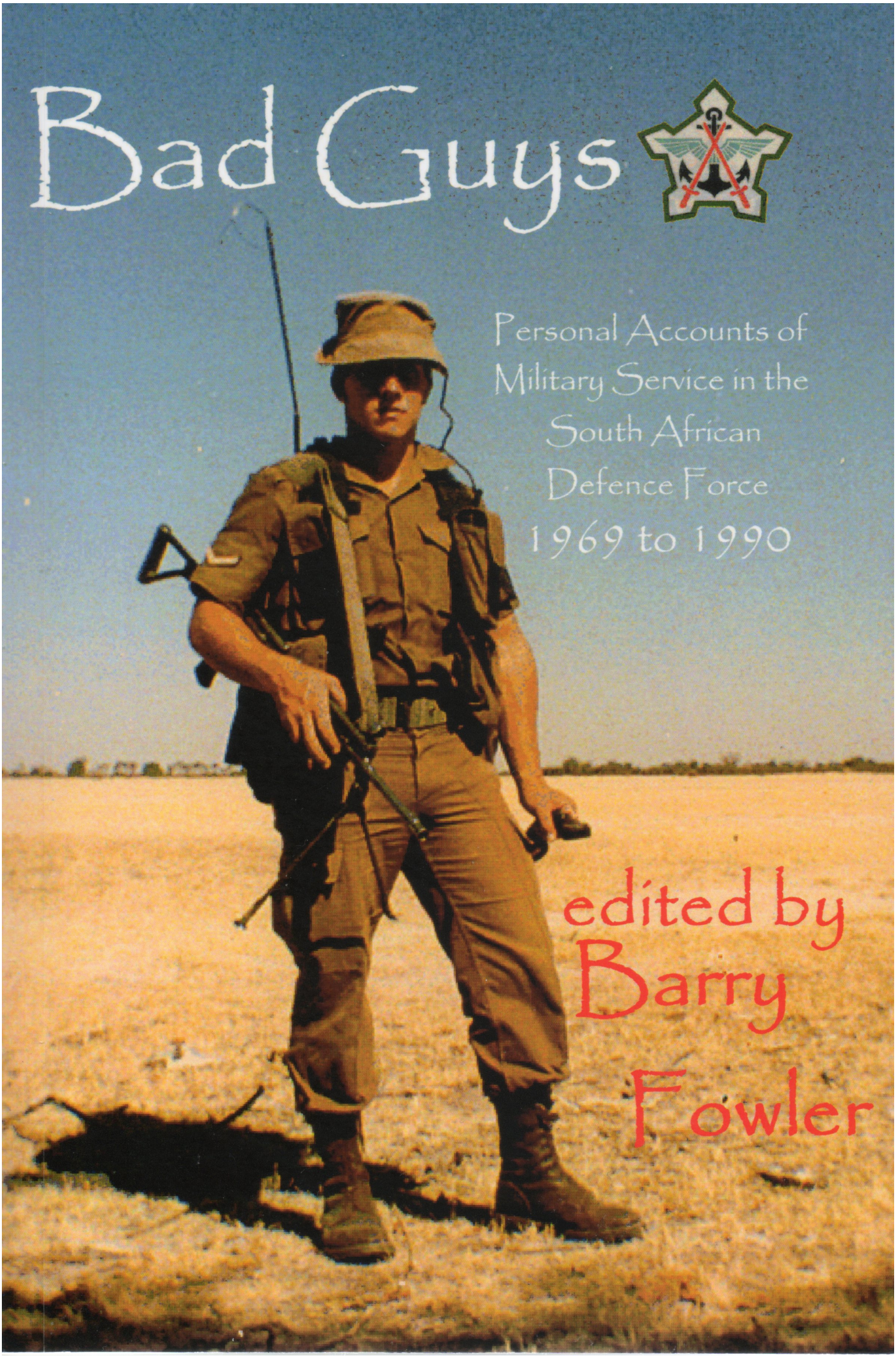
Bad Guys



Personal Accounts of Military Service in the South African Defence Force 1969 to 1990

edited by Barry Fowler

BAD GUYS

Personal Accounts of Military Service
in the South African Defence Force
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edited by

Barry Fowler

Published by

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Preface

Sentinel Projects' main purpose is to collect and publish to the Internet personal accounts of the service experiences of former South African Defence Force Personnel between 1975 and 1989, the 'Border War' years, when South Africa was involved in a conflict along the northern border of South West Africa[♦] and in southern Angola.

Initially we started to publish the collection in paperback book form, under the banner of '*Sentinel SADF Monographs*'. The first volume, '*Pro Patria*' was published in 1995, followed by '*Grensvegter*?' in 1996.

The reason the project was started was that in the early 1990s, the SADF was rather demonised in the media, with the idea that somehow the SADF was fighting frantically to bolster *Apartheid* and to suppress (if not kill!?) the Black populations of Southern Africa. As former SADF personnel, we wish to make available to anyone interested enough to research the subject that the SADF comprised a very wide cross section of the Southern African population at different times, accepting the vast majority were male, but the Force included members of all the racial groups, and all male South Africans were conscripted to serve. Many did so reluctantly, but saw it as something that was required of them - or were reluctant to take the steps to avoid national service (skipping the country, spending seven years in prison etc.) In this collection we hope to represent a cross section of the wide range of the stories of the people who served, from those determined to hate every minute, to those who took the opportunities to do interesting and exciting things.

When we started up we were one of the first, but over the years many other writers and publishers of South African Defence Force (SADF) service subjects have appeared. Sentinel aims to focus on publishing personal accounts as our perspective. Although there are several books written containing collections of anecdotes of SADF experiences, we hope to try to give the context of the person who experienced the anecdotes, including the time period served, the unit, the geographical locations etc, and with the 'personal account' hopefully something of the personality of the contributors emerges from their stories - these were real people, most of whom are still around nowadays, getting older, but still here.

The reader may ask, why '***Bad Guys***'? It was mainly inspired by the following quotation, but obviously needed the twist to make it into a book title:

Scott, John. *'We know we are the Baddies'*[♣]

It is our belief that most people, if they think about it at all, and excluding those who were involved or who have studied the activities of the South African Defence Force, will have the simplistic understanding that we were `THE BAD GUYS' who personally suppressed the black population, and with the apparent 'Winners Justice' of the later Truth and Reconciliation

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♦ now Namibia

♣ ***Focus on South Africa*** (RSA) August 1989, p. 3. The article originally appeared in the ***Cape Times***, Cape Town, July 17, 1989.

Commission hearings held in that country, not much evidence is likely to be produced to counter such an opinion. In this, and the other books, we hope to present the 'human face' of those involved in the SADF, most of whom were not remotely evil, and who were just trying to make the best they could of a difficult or uncomfortable situation, without considering themselves to have been holding up the 'Apartheid Regime'.

The eighteen personal accounts contained in this latest book are by men who served part of their service in South West Africa or Angola, during the Border War. They cover many different roles, from infantry to cooks, armour to medics, signallers to engineers. As such, their experiences are similar in many ways, yet very different in others. We trust that the reader will find them interesting and informative, as these are the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the men who were there.

Barry Fowler
January 2009

Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our thanks to all the men whose stories appear in this book.

Some wrote the story themselves, whilst others were kind enough to allow the editor to interview them about their experiences, with a view to publishing these.

All photographs used are also the property of the interviewees, and we are grateful for them allowing us to use these with their stories.

Without their individual cooperation, none of this would be possible, and we salute them one and all.

' For All Who Served '

Chapter One

'Infantry'
5th S.A. Infantry, 1969
and Camps with 2nd Transvaal Scottish

5 SAI - 1969

Before Reporting

My grandfather was a career NCO with the RASC, My father, the eldest son in a large British Army family had been evacuated to South Africa from Egypt during the war. He turned 18 in 1944, and decided to go off and join up. While he was away serving as a Wireless-Operator/Air Gunner with the SAAF, his family was repatriated. He demobbed in SA and so started the SA branch of the family.

I was the oldest son, and so I was first off the mark into National Service in 1969. I applied for Air Force, then Armour, but was assigned to 5 SA Infantry Battalion, Ladysmith, February 1969. I was not overly enthusiastic over the assignment to an infantry unit, but knew philosophically that I had no pull to get a change. My father was active in the MOTHS and so I had had some exposure to the historical side of the armed forces, and knew more or less what to expect. My cousins had done their time in the navy and air force, and seemed to have survived the experience.

Although I had some "trepidation", I was looking forward in anticipation to the National Service, probably because of the "unknown" factor. I did not have too much concern over the issue, as at that time there was little involvement of the SADF in border wars, conflicts. I think that I knew I needed the time between school and university to sort out in my mind just what I was going to do after National Service.

At this time, National Service was a 9 or 12 month stretch, with three years of "Active Citizen Force" (ACF) camps afterwards. So we were not exactly looking at a lifetime commitment here, rather, something that had to be done, so get on and do it.

I had no thought of avoiding national service, but bear in mind in 1969, the only concerned sector of the population was the mothers, like mine, seeing their sons off for the first time. There was not a lot going on, and mostly the attitude was one of "it has to be done so let's get on with it".

When I reported to 5 SAI, I think the words "fatalistic patriotism" are very appropriate. I had no thoughts of evading service, sure I was annoyed that I didn't make the SAAF (my dad was ex-SAAF), but given that, I had to do what was required. (Later on I think there was a mindset change, particularly as more and more National Servicemen ended up in SWA. I think the capture of the first South African and the parading of him around foreign capitals, was such a shock at the time, the beginning of the change. I know that in '75/76/77 period. My parents began to grill me a little more, also because my younger brother was now doing his two year stint in the Medics,

and was on the regular Casevac from Grootfontein to 1 Mil. Certainly, some of the reluctance / questioning of the strategy started about this time, I think, as more troops were committed and more casualties suffered.)

I spent most of the time prior to reporting sorting things out at home; and made some effort to get fit, although I was pretty active at the time, and in reasonable shape. However, in hindsight, nothing I could have done would have prepared me sufficiently for the first 6 weeks at 5 SAI.

Initial Impressions

I remember reporting to the Johannesburg Drill Hall, and then being "marched" to the Johannesburg train station. At this time I think that it was more an adventure than anything else. Mom was pretty upset about the whole thing; Dad pretty much unfazed by it all. My brothers, a bit younger than me, thought it was cool. The train journey to Ladysmith was memorable only for the lack of real interaction among the draftees. Most of the time there was quiet conversation as we began to come to grips with the new reality.

We arrived at Ladysmith at about 9 at night, and we were herded off the train. We were met by a huge crowd of MPs, Permanent Force Instructors, and *oumanne*, all yelling at the top of their voices. The scene was surreal, dark night, lines of Bedfords bathed in the orange glow of the streetlights. We were piled into the back of the Bedfords in no particular order, the tarps were dropped, and off we went. The greeting party treated us to a wild dark ride around the town, at breakneck speed, with lots of missed gear changes. I suspect that this was the first test. If you made it to the camp in one piece, minus some skin and with a few bruises, you were a worthy rower.

A huge parade of men at the top of the company lines formed up after we were yelled off the Bedfords. There was some attempt to get you into order, then it was grab your stuff, divide up into groups of about 24 and march down the lines to the bungalows. Drop off your kit, and then off to the QMS to draw blankets, overalls, mess kits, and back to the lines. We took some time to try and create order and sort our stuff out, then grabbed a bit of sleep. We were awoken at about 4:30 am to the sound of Corporal "Snakes" van der Merwe out in the road in front of the bungalows, treating his platoon to their first taste of PT.

I had just finished my TUEC, majoring in the sciences, with honours in Latin. I was, according to the Education Department, *tweEtaleg*. However, there was a distinct shortage in my Afrikaans vocabulary. It was a definite mindset change... perhaps the following paragraph will help explain.....

We followed shortly thereafter when Corporal Krige, our guide, mentor and genteel PF Instructor introduced us to the run to the wire (what the hell does *"raakidraad"* mean?? - hesitation, then scramble to catch up to the herd of men stampeding down the lines to the fence - now I know, and have learned my first lesson), the proper way to do pushups, and the distinct advantage of keeping your mouth shut, putting your mind in neutral, and one foot in front of the other.

The first 24-48 hours were not anything I could have imagined, then it settled down. I think, at that point, I knew that I was going to have to get through this one PT parade at a time, one route march at a time, etc. *"Vasbyt"*

is such a succinct, but eloquent description of the period, the physical and mental feelings etc.

The structured, organised, hurry up and wait process was expected, and received. Most of the kit and equipment we drew was based on post W.W.II style, although there was some modernisation - *staaldak met doibie* being the one that sticks out in my mind. For the rest, W.W.II pattern battledress, one pair leather soled boots, one pair with newer rubber soles, overalls, and webbing that must surely have been designed by a demented dominatrix. If ever there was a combination designed to torture it must have been that webbing. No matter how you rigged it, a run to the firing range under full pack bruised the buttocks, wore the skin off your shoulders, and just never fit comfortably. I had done some backpacking and even at that time, there were some decent styles that could have improved matters.

The 5 SAI camp at that time were just lines of prefab bungalows, Alpha through Delta Companies (?). The most modern thing on the base was the Sick Bay building and the PF quarters. The bungalows themselves were faded ivory colour with red polished concrete floors. All the roadways were gravelled strips, cleaning up after a rainy day was a task. I had no idea that a red firebucket, there for obvious reasons could be used in so many ways to torture your hands, arms, legs, and on occasion, the head. I think that the base was pretty old at the time, and not exactly what I expected, compared to the units I had visited (to see friends) at Potchefstroom and Voortrekkerhoogte. Ladysmith definitely needed a facelift.

The base was pretty basic. Apart from the cream corn coloured walls, which were a sort of painted masonite, we had to Brasso the window fittings on windows that were small country cottage style. Each bungalow tended the "garden" outside, carefully sweeping and raking the gravel into neat patterns.

Most of the first 6 weeks were negative surprises. The sheer brutality of the Permanent Force instructors (see later) was quite notable. I was absolutely convinced that they had stripped away the contents of several mental hospitals and somehow these examples of gentle, refined, and well-spoken manhood had all found their way into 5 SAI. The physical stresses of the basic training were tough. I think that intuitively I knew why, and what they we doing, and just hung in there, fortunately, so did most of the others. I found that the intense physical training in the morning (the 5am call of *"raakidraad"*; followed by interminable sessions of *"op - af",* and pole PT or rifle PT) followed by parade drills, and then fieldcraft instruction was tough. By the time the afternoon lectures started we were totally bagged with afternoon PT and then more instruction to come. On more than one occasion some poor soul was roused from a deep slumber in the middle of a lecture. I'm not sure how much of the theory we absorbed.

On the positive side: The fact that I could take one end of the telephone pole, and along with my partner, carry it up that sodding hill (mountain) just outside 5 SAI main gate gave me an enormous sense of physical pride and achievement, after I had got my breath back and my shoulders unkinked. That sucker had not beaten me, but I was not looking forward to the next time we had to run it.

I find it amusing that 5 SAI has been characterised as a haven for banana boys. In '69, it was pretty much inhabited by Transvaalers, and Vrystaters.

Yes, in terms of English v. Afrikaans there was some initial friction, but it ended up being good-natured bantering. There were hard-liners on both sides of the house, and the competition between these two groups usually ended up being a match of physical strength and endurance, each side having to prove just who was the tougher. It was usually humorous to watch these guys torture themselves and each other.

The funny thing was as a *soutie*, I struggled initially with some of the commands/ lectures, particularly; the one I remember most was the medic Staff Sergeant's tirade to a whole gymnasium full of new servicemen that (when I sorted it out) dealt with not sticking one's *"vuil lat in 'n vuil gat"*. I believe every week the orders of the day would specify English week or Afrikaans week. Didn't make any difference, as every week was Afrikaans.

The food was generally better than I expected, and I bulked up from a 135lb weenie to about 170 by the time I finished, and I had problems squeezing my frame into my step-outs that were issued on about day 3 of basic. I was impressed with the many ways the cooks were able to make bully beef into a visibly pleasing meal. Still tasted like bully beef, no matter how you wrapped it. Never said I liked it - that was the clever part about it - it looked good but tasted awful. But something must have worked, probably the pap. There was the usual discussion about the composition of the chemical dregs in the bottom of your firebucket after having finished your coffee. In hindsight, I honestly believe that most of us were too physically knackered to have endangered any of Ladysmith's fair maidens anyway.

Basic Training

Basic training was much more physical than I had expected. The 5 SAI CO at the time (Cmdt Botha??) was ex-'Bat, and insisted on the troops being brought to the same level of fitness as 1 Para. The drilling was mind numbing, but expected. There were many days where we did morning PT involving pushups, situps, etc, and then in the afternoon the dreaded pole PT, rifle PT, or platoon v platoon endurance runs.

As time progressed we fell into the routine, CO's inspection every Wednesday morning, medical parade a regular on Friday afternoons so that after your shots you ended up using one of your days off to recover from the tetanus, or whatever, booster shot. Weekends began to take on a routine of their own. Passes were almost non existent, so you did your washing, ironed your inspection gear on your *trommel*, spitshined your boots, continued the training of the hairs on your blanket so that they would fall into just the right pattern for inspection. Saturday afternoon sports parade, Sunday morning church parade, which for the CofE lot meant Bedfords to the downtown church, afterwards grab the Sunday papers and some alternative food from the bakery, then back to camp.

I don't think we thought our basic training was different from any other unit, but as time progressed I think we all believed it was the toughest, and we had survived it. Call it esprit de corps or whatever, it was there. We were 5 SAI and proud of it. "AVANTE"

I enjoyed the structured routine - I think I needed that at that time of my life, working on the mechanical aspects, doing things by the numbers, etc. The "fieldcraft" training was different, although it was mainly focused on

conventional operations, with very little counterinsurgency training. Much of the non-conventional training had to do with the "aid to civil power" duties, such as riot control, house to house searching and operations.

The shooting range at 5 SAI had a couple of old windowless buildings that were used for this purpose, and there most of us found out that throwing a Mills style practice grenade was vastly different to heaving a cricket ball around. Just as well they were not live!

I hated that stretch of highway (the N1?) from 5 SAI to the shooting range. The instructors had great fun *loopassing* us there and back under full gear, with fully loaded backpacks and weapons. The asphalt was hard on the feet, knees, and ankles. Most of the time we just focussed on the road in front of us and grit out teeth as we hammered down the highway. For years afterwards, whenever I drove anywhere and saw a squad double timing it down a highway under full pack, I always felt a twinge of sympathy for the aching shoulders, feet and knees. It seemed as though you could never find a comfortable position for the rifle, running at port arms, and the instructors were wise to all the tricks, like hitching the cocking handle into the front ring on the webbing yoke.

I hated the thorn bushes of the Natal midlands; every last one of them must have punctured my hide at one time or another.

Ladysmith is naturally steeped in history - standing guard at the shooting range one day on a company shoot, I was digging around in the dirt, and uncovered the usual spent bullets, etc, but also a rusted cavalryman's spur. This of course led me to spend the rest of the day (and others) thinking about the historical aspects to the location, the siege of Ladysmith, etc. I think that was one way I got around a lot of the hard times. Just look up from anywhere in and around the base, and you can see the hills and highlands, and you can imagine the battles of the siege swirling around you. It helped take away the aches and pains of the blisters and sore shoulders.

Generally, I enjoyed the weapons training, as they did qualify us on a host of different types, FN, Bren, FN-LMG, Star 9mm, Uzi, etc. The Uzi training had its share of surprises. The weapon had gained some fame after the 6-day war and so I guess I was surprised at the robust simplicity of it all. What really surprised us was the fact that the pieces we used for training were really unreliable. The golden rule was in the butts (we were only shooting at 25m) was to make sure that the suckers were always pointed at the ground in front of you or the wall, as the number of times they went off without warning was scary. I generally did not have a lot of faith in them. We trained on the .303 Bren, later rebarrelled to 7.62mm, although at that stage they were already phasing in the FN-LMG.

Standing guard at the 5 SAI magazine - a little off in the boonies, with its own guardhouse and quarters, meant that the weekend crew spent the entire time there without relief, seeing only the food brought in from the mess. Saturdays were always interesting, as the PF instructors were always threatening, and in some cases testing, the mettle of the troops on guard. One evening a couple of them got way under the weather and decided to test the guards. I was off duty and asleep, but apparently the guard did not get the correct response to the challenge, refused to let the individual in, and after some to-ing and fro-ing at the approach to the magazine, belted the PFI with

the rifle butt, ending all serious challenge to our control over the approaches to the magazine. Unfortunately for us, we were in the middle of the "bayonet" and "unarmed combat" drill phases of our basic. That Monday afternoon, all the "volunteers" in the pit, taking on the PFI and losing badly, were the guards from the magazine. I think I can still hear the ringing in my ears from getting whacked with that "basketball on a stick". Overall it was worth it.

There was always this feeling that the Instructors would do anything to some crews to really screw them up. We had played this scenario through in our heads time and time again - would we really do it. The rule by fear that existed during basic, and second phase training really worked.

Riot control drill was not something we looked forward to. We knew that from the local lore, the Instructors delighted in the fact that they could gas us, and laugh hysterically as we heaved our guts out after working our way out of the smokehouse. They really were sadists, making us *looppas* in platoon formation around the parade ground with port arms until we were heaving great gobs of air in through the filters and soaked in sweat, then single file into the smokehouse where they lobbed canister after canister of teargas at us. It was funny, after you recovered, I guess, and if you survived and were some kind of masochist. Those smart guys in the platoon that unscrewed an eyepiece to breathe easier during the initial run, just got an earlier and bigger gassing after the tear gas canisters were popped.

This was my first real exposure to the cross cultural aspects of South African society. We had Transvaal and Free State farm boys, *rooineks,* banana boys, all with different educational and social backgrounds. One of the guys got hauled off by the MPs back to the boonies for getting his girlfriend pregnant (a big thing at that time) and her dad complained to his local politico about no support payments etc. Problem was he was a short fat little guy known as "piggy" for his outstanding (pun) hygiene. We didn't want to meet his girlfriend.

Another ended up in Detention Barracks after a going AWOL for a very short period, returning high on *dagga*, and then deciding to take on all comers with his bayonet. Again my first real exposure to that sub-culture. He was the cause of our first experience of "group" therapy. Corporal Krige decided that this man's problem was our problem and that we weren't looking out for each other, so the punishment PT was brutal. I think that if the MP's hadn't hauled him off, some of us may have solved his problems permanently. Last we heard he was reassigned to 1 SSB.

During basics, our instructors were not JL's - they came later in the support weapons training and bush training. Nope. The PFI were those permanent force NCO's who were career soldiers, who had not made the officer's course. Our Vickers instructor went off and did his officer's course and was promoted I believe. For the rest, they were not suitable officer material or had yet to do the coursework, and ended up as instructors. And they were brutal.

Specialist Training

At the end of Basic, some *rowe* went off and had a go at parabat selection. Most of our PT had been geared to ensuring that anyone who wanted would be close, but not necessarily at, 'Bat fitness levels. A lot went.

A lot RTU'd. One of the problems for a many of us on the February intake, was that acceptance in the paras meant another 3 months on the National Service, and a lot of us were slated for University the following January. So unless we planned to spend another year doing something else, we would have to give it a miss.

I mustered as MMG (Vickers) for second round of training. Vickers was a very desirable mustering, although tough on the hands and shoulders. The PF Instructor (name lost in fog of time) was an example of what I now know as having sterling leadership qualities. A tough little guy, but with a compassion for his men that knew no bounds. He knew what it was to lead, and we knew we would follow him anywhere.

First you get assigned to a regiment - parade, sorted into home town, assigned to 2nd Transvaal Scottish. Then they reviewed the regimental needs lists, riflemen, mortarmen, MMG, anti-tank etc. From the needs lists they would assign the appropriate individuals to the new muster. It helped having an old schoolmate as the *ouman* section leader doing the initial selection from the list of applicants.

Once we were assigned platoons the training started.

I liked the complexity of the Vickers, as it turned out later when I did some "aptitude" testing at the CSIR and they steered me to engineering, I probably had that small boys desire to take something complex apart, put it together and make it work. Indirect fire had an appealing feature of a hill between one and one's opponent.

Basically the course involved advanced weapons training. Taking the MMG apart, putting it together again. The breech block was a nightmare of springs, levers, catches and miscellaneous items. Learning how to pack the barrel to avoid leaks. An added feature was the section fire mission, supporting fire, cones of fire, OP work, indirect fire, the maths, trig etc. There was a lot of PT involving *"raaking die draad*" with the MMG, it's tripod or the ammo cases along for the ride. We had some cross training on the mortars and 3.5" rocket launcher, but not to the same level as the Vickers, and then support weapons theory in support of infantry operations.

The course was very structured, and well taught. The MMGers at the time were (I believe) proud of the weapon's history, and the fact that we were following in the line of a long military tradition with a well designed, and useful weapon. As I said, Vickers Platoon was seen as an elite crew. For the rest we were pleased to have a cushy number, and not heavily involved in the advanced rifleman training, (if you don't believe the above).

This was probably the most enjoyable period of my National Service - I felt I was accomplishing something new, the training kept us busy and the challenges of the OP / section command interaction, calculation and operation were fun. For the most part the MMG platoon was made up of a good bunch of guys who blended together and got on with the job. This may well have been a feature of small groups across the service, who were thrown together after a tough basic training and expected to perform.

We were on an indirect fire exercise at the 5 SAI range shooting over the hill at the range and had the OP come across the radio screaming for the guns to cease fire as the farmer's cattle herd was wandering right into the cones of fire. Apparently, a squad from a previous intake had actually dropped a

donkey or two in the same exercise, and the accompanying problems of compensation had ensured that the OP/CPO's were very vigilant in watching for animals wandering around the range.

At the end of the Vickers phase of training, all the support weapons platoon went off to Bloemfontein for live firing exercises. We camped there and over a period of time, the various support weapons had their day in the sun. It was pretty dry and dusty, we were doing some indirect firing, I was in the OP when we spooked a buck out of some dense bush with a shift in target. We all thought we had hit it but the sucker was never found. We could have had a decent braai, but no luck.

Just after that the bush caught fire from a tracer round, and the command group called over to the AT squad who were pinging at a Centurion with the 3.5" training round. The Centurion came churning across, and tore up a fire break, effectively putting out the fire.

The AT platoon was pretty smug in that they had a live target to shoot at albeit with a puny .22 training round. By now we were done with our firing and the AT platoon had come forward to our OP to do some more work with the 3.5". The tank was impressive as it headed towards us, when all of a sudden it lurched to a stop and the hatches opened. The driver had apparently been looking through his periscope when a .22 round fired by one of the troops operating the 3.5 whacked into the periscope area scaring the hell out of him. He was a little green around the gills, and the crew took a lot of ribbing that it didn't take much to disable a Centurion these days.

There will be someone who questions my use of the word "periscope" with respect to the Centurion. I don't think it had an actual scope, rather the driver had an opening with an angled metal shield. I don't remember the real word for this device, but the bullet ricocheted off the bottom of the metal opening and struck the "visor" on the underside.

At various times the support weapons personnel, along with some help from the rifle companies got to put on demonstrations at various agricultural shows. Most of it was section attack drills, with the Vickers used in support, firing blanks. Like most kids, we soon got into the swing of things, churning around the arenas in those ghastly Gladiators (large *bakkies* with trailer attached used to haul one section plus weapons around), screaming to a stop with the crews baling out to the screams of *"aksie links"* etc.

Other features of our *"blougat"* phase included a hike under full pack up Mont Aux Sources in the Drakensberg, allegedly being the "mountain warfare" phase of our training. It was here that I found out that when I was dog tired and sleeping the sleep of the dead, I had a habit of talking in my sleep. After making the top of the mountain, we had a whole company crammed into the old climber's huts at the top. The following morning I awoke to find a bunch of my friends and some of the Natal Parks Board rangers giving me the evil eye for keeping them up with my somnolent chatter.

Lake Sibaya

After completion of basic training and the support weapons training, most of the companies were sent out to various points for fine tuning (eg. support weapons spent some time in Bloemfontein, working on the various weapons).

Eventually we all had to do tours at 5 SAI's "border" camp at Sibaya, north of Josini Dam in Northern Zululand, close to the border with Mozambique.

(I now remember why I hauled the ancient Reader's Digest Atlas out from my daughter's desk over the weekend. I was trying the camp at Sibaya more accuRately. I recall that is was a little west of Kosi Bay, Southwest of the horseshoe lake, known then as Lake Sibaya.) I suspect that once the 2 year service came in and the need for troops in SWA grew, that Sibaya would have been handed over to the other Units. It really served no purpose as it was too far from the Mozambique border to be really effective, and the bush there was very different to SWA. Also, I think that having the troops trample around the tribal areas was getting a little too much, although the headman that sold us the rubber chicken during our survival training knew how to get the better end of the bargain. That bird gave new meaning to the words, "the chicken that had run all the way from Biafra!"

Most of the rifle companies had already done one tour there. Each tour was between 1-2 months and focused on section / patrol / survival training. Pretty basic bush camp, typical of what came later in the Caprivi, without the berms/bunkers/mortar pits. The defining factor here was that the instructors were freed from the constraints of being within eyeball / earshot of the camp command structure and could pretty much take whatever liberties with the National Servicemen they felt like, and usually did.

All the companies rotated in, sometimes there were 2 companies there at one time. For the most part it was used to get the *oumanne* off base and into the bush where they could not impede the indoctrination of the new intake back in Ladysmith.

The assignment to Sibaya was somewhat akin to disappearing off the face of the earth. Although there was a whole intake ahead of us they were seldom seen, as they had spent a lot of time away from 5 SAI doing their thing at Sibaya and other points. It turned out much the same for us. We never really got involved with the 1970 intakes as we spent most of our *ouman* period in the bush.

The journey was a long uncomfortable dusty 6-8 hours in the back of the Bedfords, cramped, jolting, normal deployment stuff. Each platoon was assigned to one of the tent areas, and warned to watch out for snakes (*boomslange* abounded), scorpions, etc. Orientation also included hippo awareness (don't get between them and the water), local conditions (Lake Sibaya's hippos), etc, snake bite procedures etc. For the most part we had to participate in routine chores - rotating KP including cooking, camp cleanup, and over time each platoon was expected to develop some new feature of the camp as a legacy. Thus with each rotation, the camp grew bigger.

We were involved in long days of ongoing section manoeuvre training - patrol formation, radio drills, patrol formations, PT, etc. We also did some of the real interesting stuff like survival training, how to cross Lake Sibaya without getting your rifle/ ammo/ webbing wet (if your poncho didn't leak), general bushcraft training, some tracking, but not the same focus that 2 weeks in Oshivelo would later have.

I hated the combat pack run to the crossroads and back. It was only about 2 miles, but the sand and terrain was hard on the legs. Food and supplies from 5 SAI were intermittent at best, we had to cook on mobile kitchens and not

too many of us were cordon bleu chefs. There weren't too many local stores to pick up bits and pieces, and you soon tire of pilchards in tomato sauce. The PF camp dentist was of dubious qualifications and sobriety, but then nobody went to him for business, unless they were passed out from the pain.

This was the time when I think the sections / platoon came together and really "teamed" up, particularly during survival training, and the "aptitude" testing. (The aptitude testing was a case of each section being dropped off at a point 60Kilometre from an RV, given 12 hours or so to get here and meet the trucks, or hike the return. As usual, not completing the course meant doing it again. Hitching rides on tractors, with civvies was OK so long as you didn't get caught. Of course the stories about squads being picked up and transported by luscious young blondes in luxury cars were the norm - most of us hiked, and got the occasional ride on the back of some wagon.)

Most of us were seriously in fear of the snakes in the area, and after the orientation lectures this hatred was compounded. At that time we were issued plastic rounds for training purposes and one evening as the platoon lined up outside the portable kitchens, one poor specimen of a boomslang slithered overhead and was spotted. The resulting fusillade of plastic rounds shredded the snake, but caused a great deal of consternation amongst the command group, who felt that the overuse of training ammunition was inappropriate for a lone specimen.

Another time during a route march, we had stopped for a smoke break, and were sitting around and shooting the breeze, when one of the guys grabbed his rifle and took a mighty swing with the butt at my foot. I hadn't seen the twig snake moving along (it was moving real slow, and was darn well camouflaged) and about to crawl over my boot when he crushed it. And I thought it was something I had said!

Patrol formation training took place in a large open grassy bowl, with the instructor and signals group sitting on a hill, watching the platoon manoeuvre in the various formations radioed through to them. One of the platoons was moving along in an arrow formation when they suddenly froze, and then drew up in a circle around one of the signallers. With no movement from the patrol we all hiked down to the spot where one poor soul was standing stock still, white as a sheet, his boot was right next to a dark grey "snake" whose diameter was about that of a weightlifter's forearm. Speculation had him standing on or next to everything from an anaconda to an adder. One knowing soul came up, had a look, grabbed the thing, and hauled it up out of the long grass. It was the biggest leguaan that I have ever seen; ugly sucker as well. There were more than a few ready to haul ass at that moment. It got hauled back to the camp where the National Service doctor was a biology nut and handed over to him for measurement, photographing, and then release.

Survival training involved a series of lectures on local wildlife/ plants, how to forage, generate drinking water etc. All good stuff. Then a week in the bush with no rats, and one water bottle among the squad (10-12 men). Sounds great in practice, execution was SNAFU. PFI's decided that we would be dropped off the requisite distance from camp, in company formation. We would then carry their water in jerricans, their food to the first overnight base, and then move from there. Rule was no foraging/ drawing water from the Natal Parks Board Ranger Stations etc. Lot of annoyed riflemen, hauling their

food and water, taking their barbs about how good their braai was going to be etc.

That night most of the platoons went off and foraged, and came up with sod all, usual crap of snails etc, but what to expect when you have 120 men scrounging in so small an area. We were right on the coast and so even the snails were as salty as hell. Next day much of the same except that evening the instructors fell in company and administered a punishment parade, apparently some troops had got some water from or arrived at an out of bounds location, and therefore retribution had to be exacted. PT was not bad normally, but that coastal dune looked 5 stories high, and felt about 10. We started losing guys early on and this just incensed the instructors more. A couple of times they put the boots to men that had collapsed. It was pretty sad. The next day a couple of men had to be evacuated back to camp and then on to hospital for injuries received.

For the rest of us, the section leaders got together, and basically we decided to split up and go back to our original tasking, make it back to camp within the 5 days, but in smaller, platoon sized groups. So the company just melted away in the night, and we made it back to camp, hungry, dirty and thirsty. We had survived on fish caught in Lake Sibaya, road runner chickens traded for from the locals, and whatever we had smuggled in. Water was generally not a problem (quality was though), but we were somewhat dehydrated, and missing a few good meals.

The PF threw a huge steak braai for the returning troops on the first night back. Problem was all of us had not had a square meal for a week and it was all too much, with a lot of troops throwing up and getting sick. There was a poor turnout at am parade and the general mess around the camp resulted in section leaders and 2ic's being fell in and sent off on a 2 mile run to the crossroads and back. After a couple of these we were too bagged to move so I guess you could say when they sent us off for the nth time, and we failed to move a foot, it was a case of disobeying a direct order of an NCO. Fall in the whole company. Order a run to the crossroads again. Again entire company too bagged to move. Threaten them with arrest and courts martial for mutiny. No movement. Arrest the whole lot (about 120 men). Lock them in the vehicle park under armed guard. (Yup, they reportedly had live ammo!). We really didn't care. We had buddies in hospital after the dune PT during survival training, most of us were still sick and we needed to get ourselves sorted out after a week in the bush with no rats.

MP's were choppered in and statements taken from every one. No courts martial, some words to us from returning troopers that there had been an inquiry, and that one (?) of the PFI's had been charged. Nothing formal told to us. We returned to Ladysmith eventually, but were considered to be "soiled", (do not allow *those slegte troepies* to come anywhere near our new rower). Within a week or so we were sent back to Sibaya to spend the last 5 weeks or so of our National Service as outcasts, doing endless patrols and other associated tasks designed to keep us out of the camp 5 days out of seven.

Funny thing was that during this last period we followed our tasking to the letter and still ended up in die *kak*.

We were tasked with platoon sized escape and evasion exercise - our platoon was the fox and there were a bunch of hounds. We did stretch the

envelope on the boundaries, but basically our E&E tactic was to hike as hard as possible the first night in the least likely direction and hit the edge of the exercise area as soon as possible, then cruise slowly to the final RV, while keeping an eye out for the hounds. We reported in like clockwork on our radio, but never got a response. We even worked to avoid a chopper that we heard scouting around, but when we showed up at the RV, we found a bunch of officers, the dominee, MP's there. Apparently our radio was U/S, and our reports never received. They really thought we had absconded, drowned or been kidnapped by aliens because we failed to report in or respond to their calls over the radio. They had even sent a chopper out to look for us.

***Klaaring* Out**

I spent the last couple of months back at Sibaya (they transported me up on Christmas Eve along with the Southern Cross parcels for the "Boys on the Border").

Klaaring out must have been a relief, because I don't remember much about it - or I was probably quite inebriated.

I had about one week to wash the Sibaya dirt out of my pores before I started University. That first year in the engineering school was a tough one, particularly after having just finished my National Service, I was not really in tune with the requirements for full time study. A lot of us were in the same boat, struggling to get our minds around the discipline needed to crack the coursework.

It took me a lot longer to finish my degree than my lecturers felt was needed. However, I probably had a bit of a chip on my shoulder! (This came out during the CSIR testing done while I was on a pass {my only one in 9 months} where they felt that I had some communication skills problems, and this just before I was shipped back to Sibaya for the second time.)

Hardly a lengthy transition before the Jocks got hold of me.

Camps

Within weeks of arriving home and shortly after starting at University I received my first call up for parades. These were held every 2 weeks usually at Regimental HQ, and then at an old primary school sports ground (the regiment had moved its HQ to the old school). Each year I was called up for a 3-week camp, but for the first 4 years, the engineering course I was doing required specific projects to be completed. Eventually, the regiment waited until I had finished at University before calling me up for a camp.

After 18 months out, they extended my ACF commitment to 5 years, at 5 years or so it went to 10 etc. I think this was one of the defining moments, and I felt that the politicians and high command were not being honest with us at all, and the distrust of the Army High Command really took hold. There were obviously political situations to be addressed, but the arbitrary way in which they went about extending our training really pissed us off. We were fulfilling our commitment at a time when their so-called "end" point was a moving target that we were unlikely to reach. If I had been able to get a straight answer out of someone then I think I would have seen things differently. But we distrusted Pretoria so much that if they had told us the time of day, we would have checked our watches.

Parades were a different matter altogether. Be there in the appropriate uniform every two weeks unless you were gravely ill, incarcerated or on a regimentally approved holiday. Miss one and report back on Tuesday night for discussion with the CSM. My disillusionment with a few of the ACF NCO's has its roots in this system. The sergeants would call the roll at parades, and after turning them in, the regiment would summon absentees to a Tuesday night parade. ("They couldn't even get a roll call right, heaven help us when they have to lead us in to battle!")

Even if you attended Saturday's parade, you inevitably got called back. I remember one CSM's methodology for discouraging spurious claims of "I was there, you guys screwed up the roll call AGAIN", by parading all Tuesday nighters in the street in front of the Regimental HQ. It looked pretty crappy, seeing a bunch of guys, some in civvies, others browns, or TS kilt and bunny jackets, double timing it up and down the streets of downtown Johannesburg in the rain etc. I'm not sure what it achieved. This particular individual was a complete jerk on the parade ground in Johannesburg. In the Caprivi, he tended to be kept at HQ, away from us - hot air at home, fluff at the sharp end. But by then there had been a subtle change and a lot of the parade ground sergeants found themselves reassigned and a whack of "bush wise" NCO's took their place. Certainly on patrols the section leaders found themselves getting way more command / leadership experience than the Saturday afternoon types.

When I arrived at my first 2nd Transvaal Scottish parade and all the commands were in English, I had absolutely no idea of what I should do on some of the commands - I had never heard them in my entire national service. Worse was when as a section leader I was given a squad to drill, I couldn't think of the appropriate sequence of English commands to get them moving in "column of route", etc.

One thing for sure, it didn't matter a bit who or what you were in the Regiment. In the bush you were 2TS, and we looked out for each other, English, Afrikaans, *soutie*, rock, whatever. That was never an issue for us. There was more bitching about the leadership - can't we trade Sergeant X for someone. The first tour in '76, we discovered the value of being assigned to a good company, CSM Hall, ex Parachute Regiment, I believe, was a man who had seen the elephant, and was there to see to his men. Tough as nails, but you knew he was going to be a good man to follow in a fight. Sergeant Petersen, well I hope he has now learned the value of not getting slammed and passing out in the NCO's mess in the presence of his corporals. I also hope that his moustache recovered, and I'm sure his skin benefited from the sleeping bag mudpack treatment he so unknowingly endured. From our second tour, RSM van Staden, A/CSM Wright stand out, he who so delicately busted me back to corporal from my acting rank, for sowing the seeds of insurrection over the quality of food at Mpacha by way of comments in a letter home to Mum. Good humoured, great man. (Each mortar support group was assigned to a company. Generally there were insufficient sergeants to go around, so some of us corporals were given field promotions to A/Sergeant for the duration of or part of the camp. Interestingly enough, Porky Wright busted me back to Cpl, for mentioning the "additional vitamins, minerals and protein we were getting in our porridge in the form of 4, 6 and 8 legged creatures" at the same time he tried to convince me to take the sergeant's course when we got back to SA. I

was on the cusp of making the decision to leave, so the discussion was put on hold. There was no rancour, the message to mum found the right audience, and he understood the reason behind it!. It was actually all very good humoured.)

These are the some of my fellow Jocks who have stayed in my memory for the past 20 years. There were many others, Mike F. who could take us home at night with his guitar playing, Alby M. - a buddy out there on patrol, great volleyball player, solid rugby player, who the Arty at Katima just had to disable (kicked in the nuts) so they could win the damned game, many others, all heroes in my mind, ordinary guys and just fellow troopers.

1976: Winter Camp

I was working as an engineer for a big company in Johannesburg when I was called up, but was called up for 1 month extended at the pleasure of the State President under the Defence Act to a period of not less than 90 days.

There was not much I could do to get myself deferred. I had deferments in previous years (while I was at University) and now the time had come to pay the piper. I was not employed in an "essential" service, and they were short of groundpounders for SWA in the years following Operation Savannah. I think that this was the period where Army High Command realized just how many men it was going to take to contain the problem, and the callups began to increase dramatically. I use the word `contain' delibeRately, because at no time did I have any sense that there was a strategy to actually win the damn fight.

After getting things in order at work and saying goodbye to some very unhappy family, I reported to Doornkop, found the support weapons crowd, and got set up in company lines, started the medical process, forms filling, drew weapons, and any additional kit that was needed. We made sure the will was current, sorted out our pay, *ensovoorts*, begin drilling again. After a couple of days, we prepared for transit to Grootfontein.

For me 1976 was the first time I drew a full set of browns. It made a nice change from battledress, puttees, etc.

Most of us were familiar with each other from endless days on the parade ground, trooping the colour, Remembrance Day, retreat ceremonies etc. It helped to be able to buddy up with someone you knew early on, as we all had a degree of concern, anger at the call up, etc. It was good to get to know some of the 2TS troops from out of town, who were exempt from parades because of distance etc. Many of these guys, over the course of the next few years, would become those guys you relied on when the going got tough. Good men all.

I have a hazy recollection of SAA flying us in to Windhoek in a Boeing 707 and then road transport to Grootfontein. We had minimal time in transit, before going on to on to Oshivelo.

We would buddy up at Oshivelo, set up 2 man tents (ponchos) and begin "reorientation". Oshivelo in '76 (and '77) for us was simply an area along a road in SWA where they dropped us off. I am sure that in the greater scheme of things we were within the "training area" as we sure as hell spread a lot of ordinance around during training.

It took a major readjustment from civvy street to Doornkop, to Oshivelo in a few days, food, sleep, etc. Like a fast descent into hell. Two weeks of "basic" training under the aegis of a PF instructor, whose prime task was to get us back into border fitness and into shape to take on the patrols, etc. A lot of focus on ambushes, vehicle defence, mine detection, convoy procedures, ambush procedures, tracking and anti tracking. All of us were now mortarmen (no Vickers or AT work in the Caprivi at that time), so we did refresher training on the 60 and 81 mm, and patrol support with the 60mm.

We usually flew out to the Caprivi in a SAAF C130 or Safair C160 to Mpacha. The support weapons company was divided up and assigned to rifle companies. My particular platoon was assigned to Kwando, about 60 Kilometres west of Mpacha. The road transport to Kwando was the now familiar stripped down and sandbagged Bedford. We relieved the ACF company at Kwando, going through the usual handover (check weapons, accessories, ammo loads, etc.) The departing regiment gave us the early morning welcome, sirens, bunker fire, Elands ripping around into their defensive positions, riflemen hitting the wall, etc. All very interesting and chaotic, supposedly in response to possible probing of the perimeter wire. All I remember was rolling off the steel bed frame inside my sleeping bag, hitting the packed earth, grabbing my rifle and magazines, and crawling to the nearest wall, keeping my head down as tracer rounds streaked overhead.

The normal duties for the mortar crews were base defence, perimeter checks and defensive patrols around the wire, and 60mm mortar support of patrols. Rifle platoons usually were out for 5 days, back for 5. We were assigned based on 60 and 81mm sections to each company, so the section leaders ended up reporting directly to the CSM, or the senior HQ NCO.

Support weapons personnel usually stood permanent bunker guard duty on one or two bunkers to allow for reduced rifle company presence, provided convoy escort, manned the *aapkas* at stand to, and generally every crappy little task that needed to be done. Kwando's *aapkas* was a 50-60 foot tower with a tiny "crow's nest". Being the mortar OP that tour meant I ended up there every morning and evening at stand to, and every time there was a problem. I never really felt secure up there as it was greatly exposed.

Tankers from the Umvoti Mounted Rifles took over armour support, but were undermanned. Consequently, mortarmen trained as loaders and machine gunners in the Elands. The Elands at Kwando at that time had breech loading 60 mm mortars for main armament, and 7.62mm machine guns so the training was not that unfamiliar. We were only used for base defensive duties, and never assigned to the Elands for convoy escort.

Our only real face to face contact with the "enemy" was having to stand guard over a suspected terrorist in transit. For the rest it appeared to us as though it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. Based on the way the prisoner was handled, most of us developed a strong feeling that being captured was not an option.

Also support weapons provided the bulk of the camp's volleyball and rugby team, KP volunteers, and knew every inch of the inner perimeter, having cleaned it up so many times.

In some instances, we would welcome the opportunity to go on patrol, it relieved the monotonous cycle of the camp. Convoys to Katima for supplies

were good opportunities for a break, and although we were ready for trouble, it was a change for us. I had and still have this innate fear of landmines. This probably stemmed from the great prominence given to these beasts by the refresher training at Oshivelo. Every time we left Mpacha or Katima for Kwando and "locked and loaded" our FN's for the trip back, I had this vision of chunks of PE in cheese mines or the counter in a ratchet mine ticking over as we went along, and this time there would be one with my number on it.

Occasionally, the Bushmen assigned to patrols would pick up tracks, and we would gear up for an attack or a rapid response. Usually these were just probes, and the tracks would fast disappear back across the border. This was the general scheme of things in '76 in the Caprivi. It was pretty quiet, and thinking back we were not really in a high state of "mental" readiness.

A patrol came back in after their routine jaunt looking a little haggard. Apparently, according to them, they had been picked up on the first night by a lion, who spent the next 4 days following them. The poor boys thought they were all going to be his next meal.

Most of the patrols were just a rifle platoon, guided by a Bushman, with perhaps a 60mm section as additional support. They would zig zag across their assigned patrol area from drop off to pick up points trying to find spoor. One group had a K9 corps handler and dog assigned on one occasion. Their patrol through the bush had them in a temporary base around a partial track in the bush. That night the dog woke the handler (by standing on his face) and he woke the patrol up, as something was wrong, according to the dog. They had just enough time to clear out of the way as a herd of elephant wandered down "their" track through the bush.

The bushmen trackers intrigued me, they were tough little guys, who seemed to have a sixth and seventh sense. It was amusing to see how the army's discipline fitted with their lifestyle. They could appear and disappear on a whim, and nobody seemed too concerned. They were certainly a very independent bunch, and, as we later found out, quite anti-terrs.

I don't remember much about *`klaaring out'* of the camp other than I think that was the time we were relieved by one of the first all-black units out of the Natal midlands. They arrived in their own brand new Mogs, not mineproofed, and promptly got sent out on a followup to a border incursion, along with an armoured column out of Katima. The terrs had mined the tracks, which resulted in the loss of a Mog with some of the new arrivals on board. When they arrived back at camp a little worse for wear, we were kidding them that this was not the conventional way of earning their wings. One little guy, obviously in some pain from the compression injuries, responded "*Baas,* I don't know what happened, but I WAS flying!" The hot pursuit was called off after the terrorist base was attacked across the border, with some arms captured. The new troops acquitted themselves well. As we were the short timer mortarmen we got the unenviable task of cleaning up the captured mortars, which had been manned at the time of the attack.

Thereafter it was the long ride to Mpacha to rejoin the bulk of the Regiment, and after an end of tour medical on to the 130's and back to the States. Getting a solid night's sleep without a 2 hour stretch in the bunker was a real treat. It was tough getting back into the swing of things at work, having

been moved off my original project. I ended up doing some small stuff before being reassigned to another project, when the inevitable happened again.

Camp 2: 1977 Spring

I was still working as an engineer when the call up came for a 90 day camp. I did not apply for exemption, it would have been a waste of time.

Once again, we reported to Doornkop, set up in company lines, started the medical process, forms filling, drew weapons, and any additional kit that was needed. After a couple of days, we prepared for transit to Grootfontein. This time around, we knew most of the guys from the '76 camp, there were a couple of newcomers, some of whom were veterans of Angolan operations. There was no comfortable SAA 707 this time, a SAFAIR C160 Transall was used to haul us into Grootfontein.

We did the same reorientation at Oshivelo, with some new features added - there were new rifle grenades and some additional ordinance that we worked with. I seem to remember more of a focus on ambushes, TBs, etc, working with Claymores, and so on. Not a lot of change from '76, certainly just as physically demanding. Again refresher training on the 60 and 81 mm, and patrol support with the 60mm.

We flew out to the Caprivi, once again, in a SAAF C130 to Mpacha. This time around we were assigned to Wenela (from the acronym WNLA - something native labour association - apparently in its former life, Wenela had been the recruiting station for a mine somewhere that needed to import labour).

This time around we were not in tents, rather in a long cinderblock barracks, no windows, two sandbagged entrances at both ends. The walls ended and the tin roof took over, with a fairly big gap between the roof and walls that provided plenty of ventilation. Noisy as hell during a rainstorm, but you could step out of the barracks and fall into the mortar pits.

Having had the Kwando experience, we slotted in with the rifle company (A company 2TS) and did the usual shared bunker guard duty, and perimeter defence. The difference at Wenela was the northwest bunker faced the Zambian police post across the border, and the Wenela *aapkas* was in a large tree, and used for intel. monitoring of the ferry across the Zambezi, usually meaning counting heads, looking for large unidentifiable loads.

One of our mortarmen was doing Wenela bunker guard duty during the day, when all of a sudden we heard a .50 fire off a round. We all hit the mortar pits, got the comms going to the HQ, pulled the ready ammo and were ready for action, while the rifle platoons scrambled for the wall. When the dust settled the poor little sod was hauled up to us by the CSM, with our wayward squaddie claiming that he had just looked sideways at the Browning and it let loose, right through the roof of the Zambian Police Station. He was a klutzy type, but nevertheless we all had to be very careful in moving around the bunkers with those ancient Brownings ready to rip.

Early on in the tour, a convoy from Mpacha was ambushed near Wenela, on the road to Katima. A Land Rover with two Air Force officers had moved ahead of the convoy because they were so close to Katima and got RPG'd. Platoons from Wenela responded immediately and we ended up firing rounds

of illum's up for them. The tracks showed that the terrs had immediately retired across the border, and no follow up ensued.

The riflemen who were assigned to recover the Land Rover were not happy campers as there was not a hell of a lot to recover, and the recovery of the bodies was not something we had trained for. They were pretty stressed on their return.

The platoons that responded that night were led by our most experienced and, in my mind, most able section leaders. When they were told to recover the bodies, they radioed back and indicated that there was very little left. We talked in the corporal's mess later, and they were just not prepared for what they found. None of us were warned about this, or even given any support.

We had some problems as some of our light shells burst open and then fell straight to the ground, causing some consternation among the follow up platoons. We opened every round in the ready pile, and found a whole lot of them minus their parachutes, obviously a souvenir for some long departed mortarman. This really pissed us off, as we needed top line ammunition and now we couldn't trust anything in the magazine.

We spent the next few days pulling everything from the magazine, and inspecting it. It got really hot during the day and some of the special rounds got over warm and started leaking phosphorous through the seals. The crew on detail at the time saw the smoke and bailed out of the pits fast. The CSM and a couple of volunteers went in and identified the problem. Thereafter we had to keep the ammo cool somehow. A lot of it was U/S, and had to be replaced.

Fetching Buffels

Shortly after this, I was assigned to a convoy escort, and under the command of RSM van Staden, a bunch of drivers and escorts flew to Pretoria to pick up some Mogs, and some of the first Buffels we had ever seen. We arrived on a Friday, having been flown by SAAF to Bloemfontein, and then by SAA to Pretoria. The vehicles were still being gathered and so we got a "48" and most of us hit the trains to Johannesburg and home. We were pretty grubby, put our webbing and weapons in to secure storage and hit the road. Even grubby, I just walked out of the train station in Johannesburg, looking to hitch a ride home, and before you knew it the browns with a 2TS tammy had people stopping and offering you rides. The gentleman that drove me (way out of his way) was ex Jock, so there was a connection. It was about then that I realized just how little people knew what was really going on "up north". We had been losing personnel, vehicles to mines, ambushes, and we about to haul back some pretty advanced (for that day) armoured, mine proofed troop carriers, and for the most part people in the States thought that things were pretty quiet. I was reluctant to go into this, but I had a bad feeling that the s*** was about to hit the fan in the area - there was a marked increase in ambushes, and tension, in the Caprivi, compared to a year before.

Nobody knew I was coming, so I scared the hell out of my wife and her family when I showed up on the doorstep. I think they thought I had gone AWOL. Good food etc., no stand to and a couple of hot showers had me ready to face a long trip back on the Monday morning.

Things got off to a bad start when we checked out the Mogs. The 2nd drive shaft connecting the 4WD was lying in the back of the Mogs. The RSM had a fit because it was rainy season in the Caprivi, and we knew that we would need the 4WD or a whole lot of muscle power to get past some of the water hazards. There was no way the powers that be were going to fit the shafts, so with much amusement on the part of the troops over the final, public discussion between the RSM and the OIC of the vehicle facility we set off for the Caprivi. We got about 10 klicks down the highway when the first Mog died. Thereafter we seemed to suffer a vehicle (Mog or Buffel) loss per every 10 klicks or so.

The RSM was so annoyed that he routed us into Doornkop for repairs, and with handlebar moustache bristling, he headed off to see the base OC, where (reportedly) he filed complaints against the crowd in Pretoria. In about 9 years with the Regiment, I had never seen the RSM so pissed off. I felt genuinely sorry for whoever he was dealing with. It took a day or so to clean out the fuel lines, tanks, carbs / injectors and whatever the hell else was wrong with the units, before we set out again.

The convoy to Grootfontein was one of those great journeys that you see now on TV - where someone gets paid a hunk of change to travel down the spine of Africa, or across Australia. I had not driven the route before, so the opportunity to see that part of the country was welcomed. Not too many people travelling that road had seen Mogs and Buffels before either, so we had endless problems with families getting stuck behind the convoy, then overtaking a Buffel, slowing down so that the rugrats in the back could get an up close and personal view of the driver's cab, then off to look at the next one.

By the time we reached Grootfontein, we had sore asses, tired drivers, bleary eyed, sunburned escorts, so the opportunity to take time off to begin mineproofing the Mogs and get the Buffels fuelled and watered up was welcome. The thing I remember most about Grootfontein was being assigned to a tent, moving in and within hours having a million flies on the roof waiting for mealtime.

We drew ammo and rats, and were soon on our way again. The hard part was ahead, and as soon as we crossed the "red" line it was back to operational area procedures, and keep your eyes open. The roads were bad, as we expected and progress was really slow. We had just entered the Caprivi and were heading for Kwando, which we expected to make that night when we came across a flooded pan. I then knew why supplies in the Caprivi were sporadic. Scattered around the edge of the pan were a dozen or so huge Mercedes Benz trucks loaded with supplies, and all bogged down in the mud. The road in reality ran straight through the pan, under normal dry conditions. We recce'd the edge of the pan at the treeline, but it was so churned up that there was no way we were going to get through that way. In true Jock fashion (we're infantry, remember) the RSM fell in all the escorts and selected the tallest to wade through the water down the track to test the depth. We were going over the top and straight down the road.

By keeping to the centreline, I managed to keep my head out of the water, and after a wet trip of about 150 - 200 yards, I clambered up the slope at the end where the track reappeared out of the water. Not satisfied with my visual thumbs up, he signalled me back. Once again into the breech. This time I

verbally reported to him that the water depth in the middle was no more that 5.5 feet. Great briefing! As if he didn't know that!

Threatening the driver with a court martial if he got stuck, or stalled the engine and sucked in water through the exhaust, the RSM sent the first Buffel across. We got all of them across with only the last two getting a little bogged down at the end where the track had been churned up by units gone before. By that time we had the towropes out and attached to other units already through and waiting to help. At the end of all this I was mostly dry, but we were way behind time, and with no chance to make Kwando before dark. There were some comms back and forth between us and Kwando / Katima and before long we detoured off to a base that we didn't even know existed. My ageing memory may be failing, but the fearsome crowd we met at Fort Doppies that night, being one of the Recce groups, were decidedly unfriendly. We TB'd in the vehicle park and they threw us out early the next morning, with a "See you, don't bother coming back" goodbye.

Things got better as we headed to Kwando, and with the reckless aplomb of an infantryman, one of the drivers rolled his Buffel. The escort rifleman was belted in (or jumped early enough) that he wasn't injured. The RSM wasn't going to hang about, so "volunteers" were assigned to guard the Buffel until the recovery units could get to us. It was a long day and night for the driver (as punishment) and for us two escorts, as we set up a TB and checked out our firing lanes. The animals of the night scouting for food can sure put the wind up a soldier in the middle of no man's land.

We were recovered the next day and continued on to Mpacha. Once we brought those Buffels back there was a general lifting of spirits. For so long we had been transported around on Bedfords and Mogs, with only sandbags beneath us, and nothing around us, that the thought of even just a small amount of armour around us was extremely comforting.

I rejoined my mortar crew and kit, who had been rotated to base defence at the airfield. Duty at Mpacha was pretty cushy, all the targets had been mapped out, and the OP was manned by other troops. We spent much of the time just waiting around, watching the activity at the airbase and reading a lot. One of the sections was on standby as a ready reaction support squad.

Kwando Is Attacked

After a couple of weeks we were scrambled, as Kwando had been hit. There was a lot of activity with the few Alouette gunships in and out all day. Late in the afternoon the platoon sergeant hauled us out to the airbase, where we were hustled aboard a creaky Super Frelon that had taken some light damage from AK fire. Just before the ramp closed, the Doc was loaded aboard and we headed for Kwando. There was no talk, just a lot of very nervous mortarmen, who with the medic aboard knew that this was going to be a long day. As we understood the situation, Kwando had been hit by a large group of terrs, RPG, mortar and rifle fire. A platoon of Parabats was training in the area, and as soon as the attack was underway, they had gathered up their weapons, and headed to the wall. And then over the wall and were in hot pursuit of the attackers. Soon a full-scale counterattack was underway, with the trackers, armour and infantrymen all involved. The follow-up force ran

into problems with mines, and we lost an Eland, crew OK but soaked in diesel. The paratroopers and bushmen were hot on the heels of the group.

They had need of stopper groups at the cutline, and had called us in. Light was failing as we debarked at Kwando, and were held in readiness on the chopper pad, waiting for a sitrep. We checked weapons and mortars and waited. And then were stood down. Apparently the terrs had run into the first of the stopper groups, split up into two or more groups and headed for the line. With each group splitting up into smaller groups and heading off into the bush, mounting an effective stopper action was proving difficult if not impossible. After TB'ing on the pad overnight we waited until the decision was made on follow-up, (there was none at that time) and then returned to Mpacha.

Katima

Obviously the CO felt we were becoming far too slack at Mpacha, so our next rotation was to the mortar pits at Katima. Again we had fixed firing lines, and targets, however the duty had a slightly greater hazard. Legend had it that the Zambian army troops were assigned for an indefinite period, and when they felt it was time to go home to mama, they just loosed off a few rounds at us with their .50's or whatever they had handy. Delicate discussions would ensue, with the offending troops being sent home. The mortar pits were a little exposed from our point of view, being on the riverside of the base, almost a forward defensive position.

We bunked in a solid large hut just inside the gates to Katima and once again got into the routine of stand to, etc. We were nearing the end of our camp, and getting pretty cranky, so I guess it was not surprising that with a week of two left, we were sent out on a last patrol as a full rifle squad. I had no real problem with that. I was sick and tired of the camp duties by then and we knew that 5 days in the bush was better than 7 days in Katima under the nose of every officer (not just our regiment's) on the base. By this time I guess they had had enough of our *"Engelse"* regiment's weird ways such as holding a memorial service for a former Jock of some repute by way of a company parade in the middle of the Caprivi, with a piper playing a lament to the decidedly grubby troops on parade.

The patrol was pretty uneventful, although given the events of the past 6 weeks, we opted for more ammo than normal and cut the rats we were hauling back big time. One of the riflemen attached to my squad managed to leave behind a couple of grenades at the RV pickup on the last day, and had to be creative, particularly as we told him that unless we handed back X grenades, he was going back solo to find his lost articles. We were going home. It took about 20 minutes, but we handed in the right number, 2 of which were cherry type, foreign manufacture, souvenirs from some action which had recently taken place.

Finally, the last Caprivi parade at Mpacha, the medical one, with the whole regiment finally gathered back in one spot. Tales were told, experiences exchanged, the poor sods with malaria fed aspirin and flat Coke, to get the fever down and the gyppo guts settled. Onto the Herc, and off, circling the area for what seemed like hours, gathering speed until the pilot hauled back on the stick to get enough altitude to defeat any ground to air missiles in the

area. Many of us left our stomachs behind. For me this was my last tour to SWA. The next camp the following year was focused on township duties, although the Caprivi reared its "ugly" head once more.

This had been a bizarre camp. '76 was relatively easy, '77 was like the whole area had gone crazy. The number of incidents was way up, the way in which we were rotated had been a weird combination of different duties, and I had this unsettling feeling that the whole thing was going out of control. What really annoyed me was the sight of PW visiting the "boys on the border" while we were at Mpacha. Fly in your personal jet with 'Meals, ready to eat" (Mark P - for politicians), have it all set up before you arrive and sit down with the higher ranks, while the mortar crews and troops in the field guarding your transport, the base, and a whole lot of real estate have been on beans and doggies for the past few days, and then off back in time for the 9 o'clock news. Small thing I know, but I began to feel really alienated, that the politicians didn't really care, so long as we offered up our mortal coils for their benefit.

Any motivation that I had felt that I was achieving something here was lost in the events of the camp, and I felt more than ever that I needed to re-evaluate my priorities.

The most difficult time for me was heading back to work after *`klaaring out'* of the camp. A week or so back I had been part of a crew that depended on each other, worked as a team, looked out for each other in some pretty tense situations. Back at work I had to reintegrate into projects that were three months ahead of where I had left them, or find new projects because a replacement had been assigned. So for the second time in two years I had lost valuable work experience, and was shuffled around. The anger that I felt at the way in which my career was marking time was directed solely at the SADF, not the Regiment or the company I worked for. They were under the gun to produce, and had little choice over the matter. Me - I had some options and I needed to explore them.

Camp 3 1978: Late June (?)

I was still working as an engineer for a Johannesburg company, and got my first call up for a genuine 21 day camp. It wasn't even automatically extended to 90 days - hallelujah!

In late 1977, my wife and I went to Europe and backpacked around for about 6 weeks. Yes, call it a recce, that's what it was. We were scoping out the opportunities for us in the UK and Europe. I was really frustrated with the way in which my engineering career had got derailed somewhat. I needed a big project to work on consistently for a 12 month or more period, not be shuffled from one little task to another. We set a target date of August 1, 1978 as the time. I applied for and got an extended leave from the Regiment to go to Europe. Everything was lined up we sold off a bunch of things, became "house sitters" for friends and relatives, and lined up air tickets, etc.

The spring call up was no great problem - 21 days and that's would be it. Yeah, right! I reported to Doornkop, and was again assigned to the support weapons company. Most of us were now veterans of 2 tours to the Caprivi, but there were a number of missing guys, many of them now moved on elsewhere, many of them Australia, USA etc... This time we stayed at

Doornkop. This camp was all riot control stuff. How to act as a reserve force in the event of a police action in response to civil unrest. Most of the time it was small squad stuff from the back of Casspirs, with the added bit of some house to house. Then came the bad news.

Based on intelligence gathered there was a real shortage of mortarmen needed for some crisis in the Caprivi, specifically Katima. All mortarmen had their camps extended on the spot to 90 days, we had 48 hours to get our affairs in order, be back at Doornkop ready for a flight to Grootfontein. Ah well, there goes a bucket of money spent on the trip, one very unhappy wife, along with a career. So in the end I opted to apply some illogical logic.

The CO had emphatically said no deferments or exemptions, period, under any circumstances. The wife's pregnant? "*Congratulations, son, now sign here, and get in line for your shots, then go see the QM and draw your kit for the bush*."

So in the 48 hour period I applied to the Regiment for compensation for the loss of money expended as a result of them granting me a leave of absence when I had applied in January. On this basis I had in good faith booked air tickets, etc etc. A princely sum it was not, but enough to get on company commander's orders. I told them I was willing to hop the flossie to Katima, for a small fee, given that I had followed the SADF and Regimental rules precisely, applied for leave, using the right forms, etc. ("*Note sir, that it was you who signed the leave approval form granting me extended leave from August 1 through the end of the year*!") and the sum of RX,000 had been spent on this basis, receipts attached, most of this was not refundable. Here's my bank account number, your cheque in payment of the attached, will be welcome.

It was hard watching my mates head off, for me it was the last time I saw most of them. From that point on I have never underestimated the value of a well documented record of dealings with any civil servant.

I don't remember much of that camp, I was reassigned to a rifle company and spent a lot of time sitting around in a Casspir, behind a hill, listening to the action over the radios as the SAP and township residents did their thing. This was not what I was looking for - a choice of 3 months in the Caprivi or 3 weeks township duty.

It seemed so strange that after 2 tours to the Caprivi, we went back to doing something that we had long forgotten from Basic Training. It was more scary this time, because we were drilled and drilled on the steps, including having the sharpshooters ready to take out the ringleaders, something that made most of us take stock of the situation. It was one thing to mentally prepare yourself for action on the border, another to sit around within sight of the Carlton Centre, with one up the spout ready to go.

When I *`klaared out'* of the camp, I packed up my kit, including all my regimental stuff, dropped it off at the QMS, went home, and packed the H-frame, and with my wife in tow headed out. It was 3 months short of 10 years to the day when I had reported to the Drill Hall and been transported off to 5 SAI in Ladysmith.

I felt for my mates when I heard that Katima had been hammered in 1978. Was I sorry that I missed that? No, not one bit! I had the opportunity to prove to myself that I could make it on the outside, and that was a priority.

Change In Military Committments

I never did hear anything official - I left SA in '79, was called up for a 3 month camp when I was living in the UK in '80. I offered to attend if they paid travel expenses - it was declined. Thereafter I heard nothing until I tied the pieces together in '97/98 following the threads on the Internet.

I was never associated with the new SANDF.

My decision to leave SA in late '78 was predicated on a number of things, most had to do with career choices, and the desire to see as many of the continents as possible. I felt I had done my bit. When I was conscripted in 1969, the service obligation was 9 -12 months with 3 years of ACF duties. After 18 months ACF, we were told 5 years of ACF duties. At 5 years we were told 10 years, and in about '77, we were told indefinite stays in the ACF ("Finish your time in the Regiment? - Don't hold your breath!")

Given that the SADF shown no intention of living up to the original commitment, after 10 years, I had had enough. Family pressures added to that, along with a stop-start career, that was being interrupted every 6-9 months with another call up, having those imported and airforce/navy type engineers all sitting back and watching their careers grow, while this groundpounder put in another tour in Caprivi, or Soweto.

The SADF in the mid to late 70's was to me like a fat bloated organization with some real problems at the top. The fact that in the bush in Caprivi, we relied on our own wits more than on the supply trains behind us, that I would prefer to be under the command of our Regimental NCOs than some of the arrogant nitwits ripping around in the Land Rovers, all led to my lack of faith in the Army high command and the political environment around us as well.

It was 1977 before we started seeing the beginnings of the changes, a few new style weapons and ammo, (out with the pineapple grenade, in with some of the multipurpose units). The sandbagged Bedfords of 1976 being replaced with the Mogs and Buffels of 77. But we still had Mk1940 .50's with dubious mechanical reliability, some of us were still hauling around FN/FALs, and the night vision equipment we tested at that time was a joke, a huge battery, an IR generator, and then the glasses to detect the intruders. The range was awful, and I still wonder about having an IR source right next to me as I worked the Kwando *aapkas*.

Air support was an overworked Alouette with a Browning of too high a calibre attached, that bounced around the sky as the gunner hammered away at the bush. A stable firing platform it was not! Obviously air cover was not a high priority, as we were never even given the basics of ground to air comms training, or working with close air support.

No, I have never regretted my time - I learnt more about being a team player, more about leadership skills, (good and bad) and more about basic human nature in my time in the SADF than anywhere else. As far as the SADF went I could leave it, the Regiment had, and still has a special meaning to me. But I'd had enough of the insensitive and bloody-minded bureaucracy of the time, and I bailed out.

Thoughts On Leaving South Africa

I tried to document my thoughts at the time. My parents never tried to stop us, although even now I have twinges of guilt over having left. My daughters are 16 and 19 now (1999), and I know that we gave them a good start to life. I'm not sure that I could have done or seen the things we have over the past 20 years without having made the break. In 1978 there was no way to predict the downfall of the government. To all intents and purposes, they were so strongly entrenched that the only way I felt they could be damaged was through the effects of the economic millstone the war in SWA was having.

I felt as guilty as hell leaving, but I knew deep down that the only person that was going to look after my interests was me. The company I worked for was importing engineers from overseas, paying them to take over projects from the likes of me. These guys were getting the best projects, the neat promotions, while I was being shunted around. And they had no SADF obligations, although the word was out they might have to. Their feelings on that - hell they would go on to some other country and find work there. Now I'm not so arrogant as to say I was better than them, but I had one flaw. Every 6-9 months I was getting hauled off. My employers just about threw up their hands when I went to them in '78 and told them I was now on for my third 90 day camp in 2 and a half years.

Even at the point of departure I was sure the powers that be would screw me around. I had to have an interview with an SB (Security Branch) type, because I was travelling on a British passport, and needed a reentry visa to get back into the country, if we failed to make it on the outside. That was scary as hell. Looking at this I feel more strongly about the term "fatalistic patriotism". About that time there was the beginnings of an exodus from SA. Someone of high political rank said "*SA - love it or leave it*".

Both my wife and I felt that you could do both, love it and leave it. Herein lies my needing a "sober second look". I still have family there, and I would not want to do anything to cause pain to anyone. I hope that I can resolve my concerns. I don't think my limited involvement in the border war can create a firestorm of reaction to the regiment, other people or myself.

THEMES

National Service vs. Permanent Force

The PF types at the time (1969), were, in my humble opinion, 99% lunatics, with a strong sense of sado-masochism. The National Service guys were just fodder for their efforts.

The Attitude Of The South African Public Towards National Service And To Military Personnel.

I never had need for a ride in Johannesburg when you hopped off the train / hiked down a road home in a 2TS tammy and hackle (red feather). People would drive miles out of their way to drop you off wherever you were going.

The sad thing was they really had no idea what it was like doing the border duty, or what the scope of the operations were. Not that they could have done too much about it anyway. My dad even relayed an event that occurred at his golf club. One guy on being paired up with another player

said; "My son knows your son". The other golfer said this was impossible as his offspring lived in Johannesburg or thereabouts, while the other guy's son was much younger doing his National Service in the navy.

Well, it turned out the Navy National Serviceman had reportedly been part of an operation to lift troops off the coast of Angola, during one of the forays, when they had got cut off or some such event. The local lad had done his time in the 'Bats, but did the occasional camp and was probably special forces doing some intel or wet work during the '75 operations. The thing is nobody believed that there was anything like this going on, despite their own kids assurances that the cutline was merely a topographical feature on the map, and not a well respected international boundary.

I think the biggest concern they had when we were up north was to verify the rumours as true or false. Each time we were up there, the rumours had the Regiment decimated by cholera, malaria, etc, etc. Forget that fact that we were in the right place to get out asses shot off. But such was the level of restricted communication that the whole concept, in terms of magnitude and scope, of the border war was totally beyond their ability to process. As such, at that time they said very little, maybe that was best, because I was getting to be one very angry young man.

SWAPO

I had this impression, particularly towards the end of '77, of a SWAPO terr about my age, armed to the gills with his AK and all, who believed so strongly in what he was doing (getting us out of there), that a nose to nose with him was going to be a tough one to win, mainly because they would keep on coming, and I would eventually run out of reasons why I had to theoretically make this my fight.

Remember, when we were up in the Caprivi in June of '76, we got word of the problems in Soweto. The feeling was "great, here we are sitting guarding the Strip for whatever bloody reason, and the fertilizer has just hit the windmill 15 klicks from our front door back home". This did not instil great faith in the politicians, security forces or the SADF High Command in terms of their ability to gather intel or manage issues, assets, etc., on the part of the average trooper.

The ANC and MK

No real beliefs held, other than they were creating a whack of grief, and that this whole *diensplig* thing was going to go on forever as a result of their activities, and our inability to deal with the issue on the socio-political front.

Special Forces

I had little contact with SF. In the late '70s much of the SF operational roles was shrouded in secrecy, and legend. For example, based on our limited (overnight) contact with the Recce group we knew there were SF operating out of the Western Caprivi, doing just what, we did not know. We were thankful in a way that there were such groups keeping their eyes open a lot closer to the action than we were getting. Naturally, much unfounded speculation abounded; that the units were manned with ex-Angolan troops who wanted to continue the fight against MPLA / Cubans / SWAPO, or that many a tough guy from home was given a choice by a judge, a lengthy stay in a concrete cell, or a bit of fresh air and fun in the bush a long way from home.

Chapter Two

Arthur Skok
School of Engineers, Kroonstad and Services School, Pretoria 1976 - 1977

Arthur did National Service in 1976, completing eighteen months initially and then another 11 camps, the last camp in 1986. He started at School of Engineers and, after being injured, was transferred to Services School for training as a chef. He later served with 11 Field Squadron.

INTRODUCTION

My Dad had served the country fighting Rommel in North Africa during the Second World War.

I guess there are a lot of fellows out here in the Diaspora of the western world who can't forget the school of engineers. I did my National Service back in 1976. My generation really had the crap kicked out of us. I also attended numerous camps in the most god-forsaken places. Sometimes I wish I could sue the SADF for an accident we where involved in and was injured because of one stupid corporal trying to show off. I have had to consult a chiropractor more than once.

BASIC TRAINING

Two weeks from the end [of basics] we where coming back from the shooting range, and our corporal wanted to show us just how fast we could go in a Bedford. We where all sitting on the floor *`PLAT OP JOU GAT'* (`Flat on your arse') as the term was with our webbing *staal dakke* (helmets) and rifles of course, when he hits a pothole and it throws the truck right over, with about 20 of us in the back. I suffered broken ribs and my back has never been the same since. I am always at the Chiropractor.

I also had a huge black eye, from a fight with my buddy Jonny Goldberg, as we both liked the same girl in Civvy Street.

CHEF TRAINING

After the accident I was reclassified as a G2K1 and was put into the kitchen for the rest of my national service. It was then when we were sent to Pretoria for chefs training and I became an army chef and I knew those mobile kitchens back to front. I had a picture of myself with my buddy towing the rig on the border.

BORDER

I did however do a brief stint of minesweeping and did a number of five day patrols deep into the bush. My favourite story about that, is when I got up for a piss, in the middle of an overcast night, which rarely happened and I lost

my circle of guys and became disorientated. I had walked around in a circle for about five hours before the sun came up, totally lost.

The mobile field kitchens in use at the time that the author did his National Service.

Well I guess that's what happens when you take a nice Jewish boy out of a BMW and put him into Darkest Africa's Bushveld. Can you just see me stalking around alone with my rifle in hand? It's funny when you see a Biker in the street, people say 'LOOK OUT STAY OUT OF HIS WAY !!' When you see a Jew walking in the street, nobody says 'LOOK OUT THERE GOES AN ACCOUNTANT', but ...throw a rifle and a uniform at him.... 'LOOK OUT, look at the Israelis!!'

Another story that I have is we had this guy who was a permanent force chef who was the ugliest guy, with a huge jaw. A lower mandible extraordinaire, the Afrikaners called him *KAAKEBEEN* (Chin). Poor bugger could not speak a word of English. One Sunday night after coming in late from weekend pass, the guys put the floor polish machine next to him while he was sleeping. We gently wound the cord around him and the whole bed and turned it on. Needless to say he woke up and pissed in the bed. We did this to him because the previous Sunday the stupid bugger was sitting in the barracks playing the fool with a hand grenade and pulled the pin out and it dropped through the floorboards. Needless to say we all scrambled underneath that floor looking for the damn thing as he sat holding the grenade for at least an hour, until we found it.

Do you remember how we would set up camp in the bush, and we would drill holes and place toilet seats over the holes and add canvas around the perimeter for some privacy? I forget now what we called it. I think we called them `the plims'. Well there was this one guy that nobody liked. (His name was Neethling) He was taking a dump one day and one of the guys found a thunder flash and lifted up the canvas threw it in to the hole adjacent to his potty. Well I don't need to tell you that the poor guy nearly had a thrombosis.

I was on a type of mixed bag of courses to earn my officer's 2nd Lieut pip. It was study during the day and stand four hours guard duty. I had to go every Wednesday night to our HQ to help requisition the kitchen's Bedfords and help plan for next camps etc. That being said I did not get my rank during national service but only afterwards. They had to almost give me rank because

I was the only one who knew what was required and had to go to Pretoria to SSB etc..

CAMPS

Our unit, 11 Field Squadron of Engineers, was called up to do many different types of tasks. One Saturday morning at a camp at number one ammunition depot (*sic*) in Jan Kempdorp,[1] I was patrolling the fence of number one Ammo Depot. It was required that when you finished walking your one kilometre stretch of fence, that you would pick up the Phone call your call sigh `ALPHA or CHARLIE all clear' and so you would continue for four hours until you stood down and the Garri (*sic*) would come and pick you up and your relief would take over.

Well a nice midday storm was brewing overhead, and as I picked up the phone, the lightning struck the lines, threw me off my feet and I landed on my back in the mud. I was out cold for at least four to five minutes because all I remember was the guys taking me out of the Garri (*sic*) into the hospital. My ear still rings to this day. Could only happen to me!

I got home once after a three month camp in Lohatla, only to find my fiancée in bed with another man. I came home three days earlier than expected at 5.00 am in the morning.

The last Camp I did in 1986, my brother had me flown to the camp with his light plane and I arrived like a king, as at that time, I was a full Lieutenant. It was great fun. It was at Jan Kempdorp, Number one Ammunition Depot (*sic*). The runway was right next to the Barracks and was a civilian aerodrome, oh what fun that was. However, I had a very bad stand up fight with another Afrikaans Lieutenant as I said that within 10 years, there would be a black government, and of course that did not go over very well. Even at that stage I found that the Afrikaners where splintered in what they believed would happen as, let's face it, the country had to change. Anybody with a half a brain in their head could figure that out, even at that time.

I so hated those camps, but there was nothing one could do. You know as well as I you had to go whether you wanted to or not. The things that hurt me the most now are the sights I saw on the cleanup operations in Angola where I saw a lot of dead bodies and how cruel the FNLA [MPLA? – *ed.*] had been and booby trapped kids with explosives so that if a soldier felt pity on them, they would pick the kids up only to be killed or maimed by an explosive. I saw the mess of that. Then later on, having to do township duties was lousy. Having to watch tear gas being used one day in Alexandra township, knowing that my parents lived about 10 kilometres away.

NOW, LOOKING BACK

I live in Canada now and am 47 years old. So as I sit here today on a very cold January (2004) morning typing this. Let us be grateful for the countries that have adopted us. I will however always be a *Boertjie* at heart and am balded yes, but I am fit and still running like I did in the days of the MMI runs

[1] The ammunition Depot in Jan Kempdorp is 93 Ammunition Depot, not 'one ammo depot'. – *editor*.

in basics. Looking at those pictures on your web site[2] brings back the warmth of the sunshine and even the smell of Africa.

However the one thing the Army taught me is how to hang in. When you think you have run out of steam, that's when you really get going. I went on to run many marathons including the Comrades in 1986 before I left for Canada. The most disturbing thing for me was the BAD GUYS section of [Sentinel] web page as I still find myself affected by the stigma of being one who held up the regime, when in fact I spent days in the townships keeping the peace. Please add me to your list of people if you wish. I still have my step out uniform but have lost my Pro Patria medal. When I looked at the pic of the guys sweeping the roads for mines I felt that old feeling and could even smell those old smells of Africa the bush and the cordite from the thunderflashes.

I have no photos, because all I had was lost in a basement flood about four years ago. The only things I have left are my full uniform, and my original intake ID card with my army number on it.

The Army was an experience I would have willingly done without, but one that in a way I'm pleased I had. Like I said, on the positive side, it made me a man very young, but it caused me many long term problems. I am very bitter about South Africa. No one can point a finger at me and say I ran away. I paid my dues. 18 months service and 11 camps. I did my last camp in 1986 and left for Canada in 1987. I could not get my career off the ground, as the Army never left me alone.

South Africa for me is a tragedy. I so much miss the sunshine, the food the sense of humour, but it is a closed book for me now after being away for 16 years, a lot has changed there. On my last visit in 2002 I found it to be a very different place with some very large social problems. Needless to say AIDS is a problem that is so large, that I heard of a class of medical students who are half way through university, that won't live long enough to see their own graduation. These where probably the little kids we where trying to protect back in those years. My parents where going to stay in South Africa, but my Mom got mugged and had her car and purse stolen back in 1989. They landed in Canada nine months later.

[2] http://sadf.sentinelprojects.com

Chapter Three

Graham Laxen
Services School and 5 SA Infantry, Ladysmith
Etale and Oshikango 1976 – 1977

CALL-UP

I was called up to Services School for Basics, not too far from home at Voortrekkerhoogte. My brother had been to the army before me and had a keen interest in military things. I was dropped off at Milner Park and the train from Johannesburg left from some railway platforms in a valley behind the Rand Easter Showgrounds. I didn't know anyone on the train but had brought a pack of cards. We played cards most of the way and got to our destination in the early afternoon.

SERVICES SCHOOL, VOORTREKKERHOOGTE

We were issued *trommels* (trunks) and blankets, and told to just find a bed anywhere. We'd be allocated to companies the next day. At this stage it was a bit like a holiday camp, we were thinking the army wasn't so bad. Next day companies were allocated along educational standard, with A and B remaining in camp while C Company was sent out to Elandsfontein, a remote place where the bungalows had no windows.

I was allocated to Bungalow 1642, and a number of beds were left empty for the arrival of the Cape Town contingent. A day or two later, late at night a train whistle blew and an hour later they filed in. There were four married men in the bungalow and they each had their own little room in one of the corners. The bungalow was an old brick structure that accommodated about 30, with a long verandah along the front. We walked across to SAMS ("medics") for our medical tests – it was a relief to find out that all the schooldays rumours about "tapping your balls with a teaspoon" were false. The group was 70 percent Afrikaans speaking, 30 percent English (including one guy who grew up in England and couldn't understand Afrikaans at all). About half were from the Cape, the rest from around the Transvaal.

The platoon was then ready to start basics. We met our corporal – a real crosspatch who never smiled. When the training began it was a huge shock – how did life suddenly get this horrible? Not only that, but it was going to go on for a full year. The even bigger shock was PT – the objective seemed to be torture and humiliation rather than actual physical fitness. The hour of PT went past very slowly. There was full-on verbal abuse and in return some pathetic whining from amongst the victims. At one PT session I went and stood at the side of the field for 10 minutes or so. Nobody questioned me, and it gave me a brief break to recover some strength. However such chances could only be taken once in a while.

Worst of all was pole PT – a huge telegraph pole had to be lifted and carried by four people. Just to stand and hold the thing on my shoulder made my heart beat loudly and I started to feel faint. It was also hard to share the load across four people – inevitably the taller ones ended up with the load. Some of the very loud mouths – those that were so excited to be in the army, were going to be officers, might even join PF – became very quiet as the reality of army life set in. There was a rush to the telephones by some to see if some doctor somewhere could uncover a dark medical secret, enabling a reclassification away from G1K1. We had to run in formation every afternoon around the streets, and after a few weeks had a route march out to Elandsfontein (30 kilometres).

The rumour during school days had been that the army would tip copper sulphate into the coffee to deaden all sexual desires. Apparently there was indeed an additive, but it wasn't copper sulphate - whatever it was, it was indeed potent. We were focused on the more base needs of food (will today's punishment finish before the mess hall closes?) and shelter (can I sleep on this bed and still have it ready for inspection?). Sex was a far away concept, and in fact on an icy Voortrekkerhoogte winter's morning, a hot cup of coffee was far more useful than an inconvenient erection.

At one point there was a big meeting called on the parade ground. Some unfortunate guy was marched in for sentencing, he was off to DB (Detention Barracks) – his crime was hitching on the highway. This gave us a sick feeling as he was just being used as a victim – national servicemen hitched on the highway every day. It showed us what a temperamental hierarchy we were dealing with.

One day the wrath of the instructors was really let loose – there was some misunderstanding and they thought that they had been insulted. There was a huge *straf* (punishment) PT session from mid afternoon and into the night. During the very first minute I ducked behind a wall and disappeared – this was known as a "gyppo". I was able to have dinner and read some Car magazines in the library, before rejoining the platoon for roll call that night. The whole time I was in fear of what the consequences would be if I was found out – in fact I wished I was doing the *straf* PT. If my gyppo was detected I could be severely punished, or worse the whole bungalow could be punished on my behalf. Once I realised I had gotten away with it, there was a feeling of great satisfaction for outsmarting the system. This and the one PT session were the only occasions when I recall getting out of anything. One guy in the next bungalow had apparently been living with a 25-year old woman before reporting for army duty. She used to drive him around and pay for things. Even more impressive, he didn't talk about this himself but another guy who was his school friend told us - so this story had real credibility. And 25 was really mature - not quite as old as your mom, but getting there. The idea of a chauffeur, bank manager and Penthouse Pet all rolled into one made us realize that the army was seriously wasting this guy's precious time.

We were paid for our time in national service – I think the rate was about 37c per day. This would be left to mount up (took a while at that rate!) and would be paid out at random intervals. Maybe something was deducted to pay for haircuts, I'm not sure but I seem to remember this. The food was good but very predictable and there was no shortage. I don't remember any canteen in

Services School but there may have been one. I met up with some guys from the Cape and we became a group of good friends. There were always lots of jokes and laughter at the expense of the army, our instructors and our fellow troops.

We were told that our week at Rashoop was planned to be the worst week of our lives – there even the slackest of *"rowers"* (recruits) was going to be beaten into shape. We were loaded into Bedfords and driven out beyond Brits, to a forsaken camp in the bush near the settlement of Rashoop. We joked that it translated as "the hope of our race". It was a Saturday when we got there. We each had to pair up with another guy and pitch tents made out of two canvas sheets. I remember on the Sunday we were joking around a lot with bogus army commands ("*vir inspeksie, vou kombers*") ["for inspection fold blanket". It's based on "for inspection present arms" - a command that led to a four or five stage convoluted process that all us poor *dom troepe* struggled to get right!!] while from the other tents came the sullen looks of other rowers.

On Monday morning, the jokes were over, the instructors were in a foul mood and the training was full-on - leopard crawling, running up and down the embankment behind the shooting range, and a route march from 25 kilometre out of town. We did shooting during that week, I had prior experience and my score was quite good (this point relevant later). The toilets at Rashoop comprised a long board with several holes all in a row, open to each other with no privacy at all. The secret was to wait for nightfall when the flies were asleep and the procedure was less visible. Finally the week came to an end and we went back to the camp. The bungalow seemed like some sort of luxury after Rashoop.

On our return, the sergeant downed a bottle of whisky (or most thereof) and called us together to deliver his great speech, *"Basies is Oor"* (Basics is Over). Despite his drunken difficulty in pronouncing his words, this speech was music to our ears and we hung on his every word. I'd say it was one of the greatest speeches I'd ever heard. Monday morning we discovered that sadly most of the instructors had missed out on this captivating delivery. A few troops tried to bring them up to speed – strangely this was not appreciated at all. Basics was anything but over. In fact if anything it had moved up a notch and was worse than ever. I think Services School had the approach of ensuring Basics was really tough, as the troops were expected to become filing clerks, storemen and cooks – so would have an easier nine months ahead of them. The logic was that a full year of torture needed to be fitted into the first three months.

We got one pass from Services School – it might have included an extra day I think, because a lot of guys flew back to Cape Town. I had actually been home for dinner once during basics – there was a weekday evening when we were allowed out to church. I met my parents in the carpark and they took me home for about an hour, and dropped me back at the church. It was really enjoyable to have outsmarted the system – might not have been such fun if the car had broken down though. On Sundays sometimes, my friends and my brother would drive out to Voortrekkerhoogte and park at the church, and I would sit in the car and talk to them. They always brought some food as people in the army are always hungry.

As the end of basics approached, those who volunteered for specific roles (JL's, PTI's etc) were allocated to their new units, while all the schoolteachers were packed off to Oudshoorn. The rest of A Company were transferred to Infantry – about 30 of us had the objective to stick together, and we were sent to 5 SAI at Ladysmith, by train.

5 SAI LADYSMITH

The camp at Ladysmith was an architectural disappointment – ancient bungalows made out of boards, unpaved roads – it looked like surplus premises from before World War II. Even worse, as we were marched to our destination we went through the camp, out the other side and down the hill to a remote hangar. This was C Company, made up of three sections 7, 8 and 9.

The nearest facilities (toilets and showers) were about half a kilometre away up the hill. There was an enclosure of "piss buckets" near the hangar. Meals were fetched from the mess in a jeep and served in the hangar. We got to 5 SAI just before school holidays started, so in the distance were the cars of holidaymakers heading down the N3 highway to the beach, just to add to our desperation and mental torture.

It was evident to the Sgt Major that the group from Services School were very good at drill. Life settled into a harsh routine with each day starting with the "two comma four" – running 2,4 kilometres in under 12 minutes, and if this was not achieved it would need to be run again. This was done in the dark before sunrise, usually around 5 a.m.

The emphasis at Ladysmith was more about fitness than presentation for inspection. I remember one day the Sgt Major told us that Jody Scheckter (a famous racing driver) would be visiting us, and we were to be on our best behaviour. I was excited to think that now we were in the Infantry, we would be getting visits from celebrities and national heroes. To our horror "Jody Scheckter" turned out to be *"waentjie PT"* – pulling a very heavy cart (intended to be towed by a Bedford) around the base. I remember that when I was rotated into the front position at the "V" of the wagon, my heart started to beat audibly and I almost passed out. Jody Scheckter made many unwelcome visits from then on - but never in person!

Pole PT was not as bad as at Services School – the poles were smaller and it was two to a pole, so at least each person only carried 50% of the weight. We covered great distances with the poles – across the river at the base of the camp, and up the hill across the road from the main entrance gates. During lectures there would often be the command *"om die magazyn"* [Around the magazine]– we'd have to drop our books and run down to the magazine at the edge of the camp, and back again. The last third back would be intercepted and sent again. A 5 SAI speciality was *"skaapdra"* (carrying like a sheep). I had a *skaapdra* partner who was quite big but was amazingly light as a feather.

Another frequent activity was night PT. The hangar was far from the main camp and was therefore largely unsupervised – the instructors could do virtually what they wanted. A whistle would blow in the middle of the night and if everyone was not out of the hangar on the count of 10 (which of course was impossible) then we had to carry our trommels around a pole in the

parade ground. This would be repeated and varied over the next hour or so. After a while some guys would lose all dignity and start to beg for mercy.

Playing cards during 'hurry up and wait" time.

Finally after some months there was the possibility of one weekend pass. Initially this was to be for everyone, then the rules started to change and the pass depended on the time taken in the 2,4 km. Almost everyone cleared that hurdle and on the Friday when the pass was to be issued, we ran to the shooting range. The shooting scores were recorded, then once we had made the return run back to camp, we were told that only the highest scores had earned a pass. Those going on pass were all those who had been at 5 SAI for Basics - because they understood that it was necessary to bribe the guy in the *"skietgat"* who was marking the score. So we had some excellent marksmen who even earned a golden *"baltjie"* (badge) for shooting excellence – they were the ones who had paid the *skietgat* well.

Among the punishments was one called *"Liter Liefde"*. The objective was to drink a litre of water, do *straf* PT, drink another litre, more PT and so on, until people were throwing up for the entertainment of the instructors. One morning it was decided my inspection was not up to scratch, I was a *"slegte"* (bad guy) and I was told to *"klim in die bus"* (join the punishment squad). To the lieutenant's disappointment I was able to down every litre and not vomit. I was left out of *Liter Liefde* after that as I spoiled the fun. There was a trampoline in the centre of the hangar for the outworking of any remaining energy at the end of the day. One guy used to trampoline frequently wearing nothing but a pair of army socks. I'm not sure whether the constant bungy-

jumping of his genitals would have done him any harm, but I doubt that it was much of a health tonic.

We had to spend a week at Boschoek, located north of Ladysmith on the road to Standerton. It was a large piece of land with the Biggarsberg mountain as a backdrop. All gunfire was to be directed towards the mountain. We had to dig into trenches, and could not move around freely in daylight in case of being seen by an imaginary enemy. After dark we could go up the hill through a graveyard to get food. At night there were patrols to find and identify checkpoints and features in the landscape. Boschoek was meant to be uninhabited but I remember one time at about 3 a.m. we ducked down behind an embankment and a human figure walked past. In the lap of the mountain was a small abandoned village. On daytime manoeuvres, always after scaling some hill, leopard crawling in a fire-and movement exercise, or on a route march, at morning tea time no matter what the terrain, a Bedford with a tea urn would appear.

The hangar, where C Company lived during national service.

At around that time a member of the company wrote to a magazine called "*Armed Forces*" – they usually wrote about mercenaries, new weapons etc. – and as a result a journalist arrived to investigate C Company. The contact had been anonymous and many people thought I had written it. The journalist wrote an article and took a number of photos – he focused on our section (Section 8) as that was where his contact was from. The journalist took the rifleman out to dinner in Ladysmith as a reward. (see *Appendix* at the end of the book)

Our section had a PF corporal, who was so *"kop-toe"* (keen) that he got his

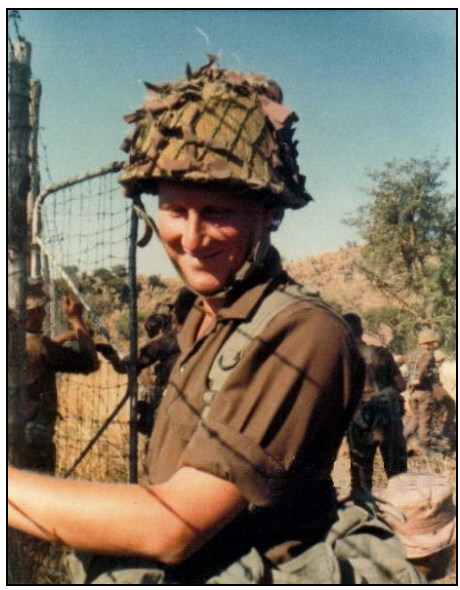
Rifleman M. Senior and the bungalows of Ladysmith

own Citroen sprayed in a military green colour. He liked to fire canisters of teargas at us after a long run. When he lost his temper (which was several times per hour) he would be unable to speak anything further than "fffffff.." – even his favourite word he could not utter. His eyes would flicker open and shut and his eyeballs would roll back into his head. The rumour was that both his parents were brain surgeons in Durban, and that they had used him in some bizarre experiment. I'd wake up in the morning and think, why is this man in control of my life?

We had a Portuguese major, a guy tried and tested in the liberation war for Mozambique. It was rumoured he'd killed many people and didn't care if he added a few more to his tally - especially a couple of *"dom troepe"* (stupid troops). We had to jump off moving Bedfords – regulation speed for this exercise was 25 km/h but the corporals were laughing and had a mad look in their eyes, and through the back window we could see the needle hovering at 40. Anyone who was hesitant would be killed or injured, we had to run full speed to hit the ground standing. Amazingly nobody was hurt. We heard that B Company was not so lucky and on one of their exercises at Boschoek a Bedford rolled and someone was killed.

We were sent home on a seven-day pass. With so few passes during the year it was strange to be out of the army for a while. The army seemed to widen the gender gap in South Africa. I remember going to a party and being lectured by a girl my age, about how it was necessary for guys to go to the army, that it was character building, that wimps were turned into men, and so on. I thought how easy it was for this spoilt upstart to say when she had no concept of the suffering in the army. She had the superiority and smug

satisfaction that she was unaffected by the call-up. From that day onwards I saw the merits of Israel's system, where the girls were called up too. On the train back to Ladysmith, one of the guys in my compartment was a fairly stocky and aggressive troep who decided to go to the lounge car to try his luck. He met a girl and they agreed that at the end of the evening they were going to go back to her compartment and "put it" (exact quote). I think her idea of the end of evening was intended to keep her options open, and sure enough a better offer came along in the form of another 5 SAI rifleman, taller and better looking. So she decided to trade in the first guy on this more upmarket character. The first guy however was not giving up that easily and started a fight, getting them both thrown out of the lounge car. The fight continued in the passageway outside our compartment - a feat in itself as swinging a punch in that confined space was no easy task. The girl meanwhile realized that these two guys were now fully focused on each other, and shuffled back to her compartment to sleep off whatever alcoholic beverage had made either of these "*vuilgatte*" (deadbeats) seem in any way desirable in the first place.



The author (left) preparing for river crossing training, and near the pink gates of 5 SAI, Ladysmith.

Back in camp, on Christmas Day we were allowed to buy a few beers after church and sit near the swimming pool behind the canteen. There was no jeep collection for food and we had to eat in the mess hall. One of the guys – the company clerk – miscalculated his tolerance for beer and during lunch his face flopped down straight into his meal. He passed out and had to be carried down to the hangar to sleep it off. Actually in this case the words "straight" and "company clerk" don't belong in the same sentence.

THE BORDER

Etale, 18 kilometres south of the border crossing at Oshikango.

The day arrived to set off for the border – three days by rail to Grootfontein, and then onto Bedfords for the rest of the way. The Owamboland countryside looked like a heavily populated garden situated on a vast flat beach of sand. Our base was Etale, 18 kilometres south of the disused border crossing at Oshikango.

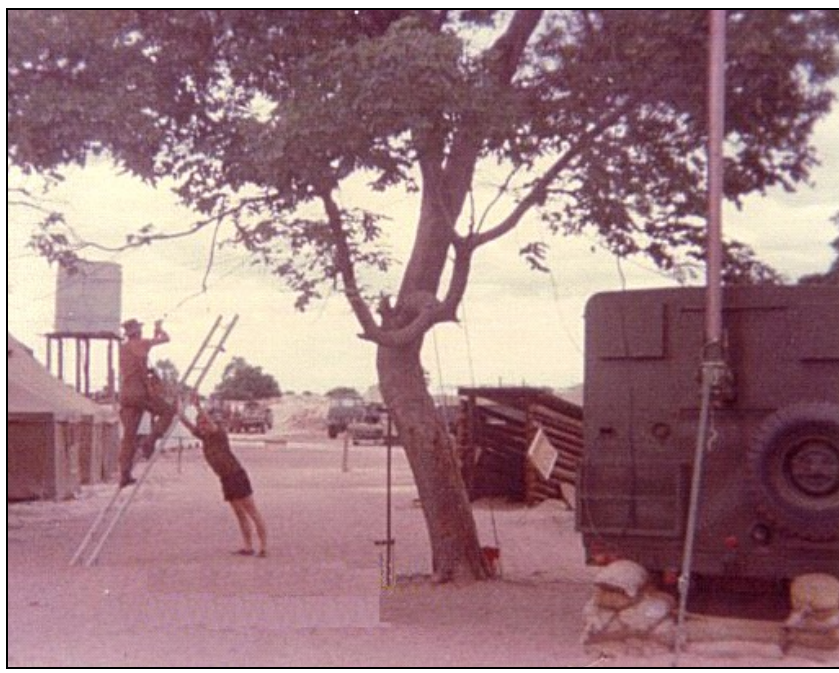
The rumour was that Etale had been attacked in the recent past. Each week all but one of the companies or sections would be sent out on patrol. Our first patrol was to a place called St Mary's – there was an old hospital that had been destroyed by mortars, just south of the Yati Strip (the one kilometre wide no-go zone) at that point. We were tense that first day patrolling the border and sure enough before long a shot rang out. We jumped from the Unimogs (vehicles) and crawled under cover – but it turned out to have been an accidental shot fired by the unit's own Rambo. He spent a few days running around with sandbags on his shoulders after that, and became a far more humble human being.

There was a canteen in the camp at Etale, which had been dug out and built underground. One day there was a rainstorm and the canteen was turned into a sea of brown water, with Tex bars and Castle Lagers bobbing on the surface. They built a new canteen after that.

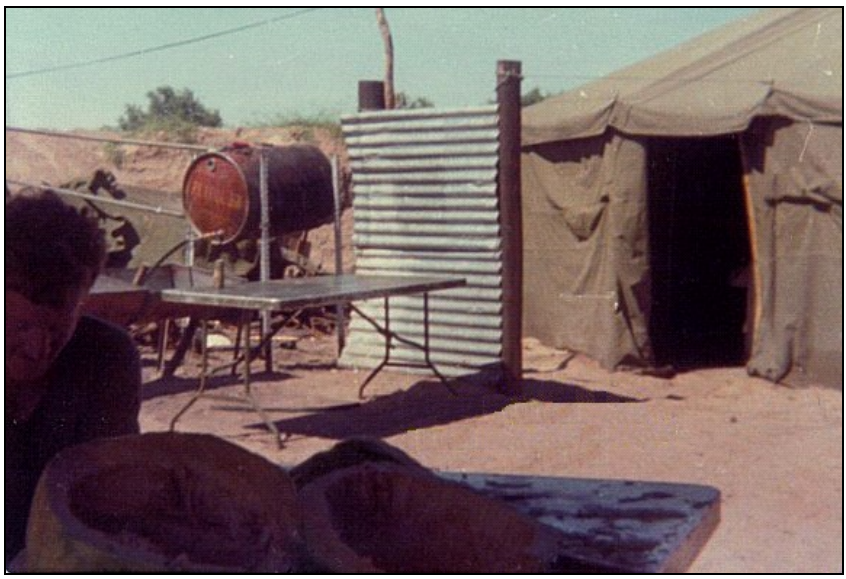
Back in Etale, the major had a huge problem on his mind. The 5 SAI radar unit had been set up in the Yati Strip just west of Oshikango, and it was picking up a large number of troop movements across the border. The major contacted Military Intelligence, and one morning a convoy of Bedfords took the high-ranking luminaries out to the radar station. After much investigation

it turned out that the radar unit had been set up to face the wrong direction, and the troop movements being monitored were the vehicles moving in and out of Etale.

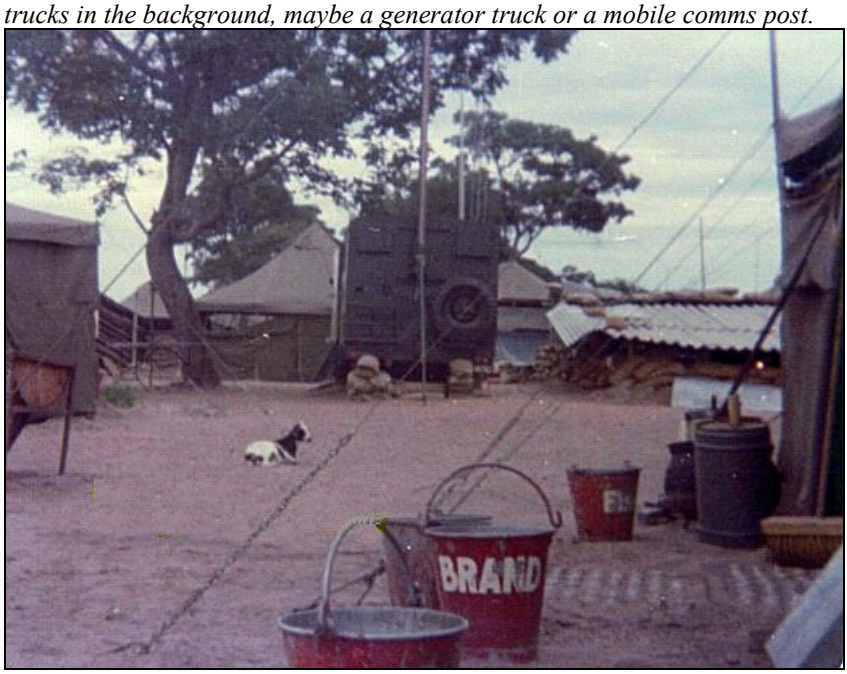
Oshikango was the border post on the main road north to Angola.



The canteen picture (which also has an NCO on a ladder fixing an aerial wire, while a 'dom troep' holds the ladder) shows the entrance to the underground canteen. It is this canteen that filled with water during a downpour.



The kitchen scene shows one of the chefs at work (on a pumpkin it seems) while the goat photo below (I think it was a sort of pet) shows one of those trucks in the background, maybe a generator truck or a mobile comms post.



We were told that the staff sergeant had "gone to the States". I was greatly impressed, and envisaged him travelling across New York harbour on the Staten Island ferry, or consulting some of President Carter's military luminaries at the Pentagon. I was troubled though to think that a halfwit

should have been sent to the USA to represent his country. It was later that I found out that when in Owamboland, "the States" referred to South Africa.

We went on several patrols west of Oshikango, often through wide patches of water that was thigh-deep. It was the rainy season and often the tents were inadequate and everything was drenched. Our brief was to befriend the local population and one time at a kraal we had to drink a sour home brew with a couple of dead "miggies" (tiny insects) floating on the surface. Later, east of Oshikango, we were lying in formation one night and the person on guard duty fell asleep. In the morning there were tracks through the middle of the formation with a shred of light blue wool on the Yati fence. The lieutenant was devastated as he wanted the credit of a "kill" to his name. Around the same time another section got a kill and buried the body in the Yati with a headstone of *"Vasbyt"* – people would point and laugh with no regard to the fact that it was someone's grave.

An Owambo kraal visited whilst on patrol.

The final month on the border was spent at a camp called Miami. By now the PF's were getting careless and one night they had our section of Yati overlapping with another section, by two kilometres. Fortunately the two patrols never met up in the dark that night. Our time at Miami was quite relaxed and the day came when the next company (a group of campers) took over. We were later told that a few weeks after we left, Miami came under heavy mortar fire with several casualties.

Unimogs patrolling the Yati fence near Miami, about 30 kilometres east of Oshikango.

BACK TO LADYSMITH

On the way back to Ladysmith, the rumour was that when we got there our time would be extended beyond 12 months. Everyone was depressed, and sure enough a few days later the whole of 5 SAI was called together for a meeting in the hall. Dreading the worst, everyone sat in silence. Then the purpose of the meeting was announced – did we think that bottled beer or beer on tap would be more suitable for the new mess? We were disbelieving that a meeting would be called for such a trivial question – the relief was huge and the noise level rose to the point where they abandoned the meeting.

The last few weeks at 5 SAI were a bit like being at a country club. There was no forced exercise, lots of instructional movies, beers in the evenings on the verandah of the new mess, and a couple of days spent burning firebreaks at Boschoek. The only problem in life was that we were on guard duty every second night. It was so cold that it was not possible to warm up between shifts – so effectively a guard duty night was a sleepless night.

About this time people started parking their cars on the parade ground ready to go home. There were rows of brand new cars – I later found out that the railways (employer of most of the company) had kept paying their

employees during their army service – so there was a lump sum ready to spend on a car. The man's car was the Datsun 120Y, while the truly macho went for the Mazda RX2, which normally manifested itself in a burnt orange or a lime green. Those that were not already employed had definite plans for their lives at the end of that year – they had wasted enough time.

RETURNING TO CIVVY LIFE

The day that I drove out through the big pink gates at Ladysmith was a high point in life. A few days later I was back at work, with the new habit of *"strekking"* (standing to attention) for the boss. It was hard to settle down and for some months I had nightmares. I was advised that I had been posted to Johannesburg Regiment, and I received call-up papers for a camp the following year. As I was at university part time the call-up was deferred, and in fact I never went back to the army again. I graduated in May 1980 and moved jobs a month later, to a position in Sydney, Australia. I sent a polite note to the regiment to advise them of my change of address, just in case I fell into their clutches again in the future.

The most memorable thing about the army was definitely the good friendships made. The ways that the army changed me – it made me enjoy exercise, it instilled a habit of getting up early, and it made sure that I will never voluntarily go on any camping holiday!

Chapter Four

'Steven'
5 SA Infantry, Ladysmith 1976 - 1977 - Mapalela Island
SADF Mortarist - 72 Mechanised Brigade

Steven contacted me after having read Graham's account of 5 SAI[3] from the same intake. I interviewed him on 29 November 2005 and he was happy for me to tape record our interview with a view for publication. He's not replied to me since, but I am going ahead and publishing his material anyway, even though I would have preferred to have polished it some more in collaboration with Steven.

Steven was called up to 5 SAI in July 1976 when National Service was still one year, and spent time on Mapalela Island. After this he was allocated to 72 Brigade in Alrode, with the Johannesburg Regiment. He was promoted to Sergeant and did four border camps and five one month camps.

REPORTING

When we first got to the army – [it was at] the station in Johannesburg, and we had to go to Ladysmith. The funniest was when you first get there and you see these big guys in their browns, with one or two stripes. You realised when you do your first three months that one stripe is quite important. You only ever see one stripe normally, and two stripes if you are very lucky. Everybody's there, still in civvies, quite relaxed because you are only 18. Then you get in a train with a bunch of guys and you make mates. When you eventually get there, and after they cut your hair, you don't know who anybody is anymore.

BASIC TRAINING – 5 SAI – LADYSMITH

I did my basics at 5 SAI in 1976/77. We were the last intake who got away with doing twelve months.

It was funny when I was doing basics and they were handing out rifles and kit. They had one rifle, an R.1 that they had hidden in the back. They waited for some unsuspecting guy. It was bent. They would give it to a guy, and he wouldn't know what to say. He would carry on walking.

We had this guy in basics who was from Natal – he had red curly hair. He used to take a lighter and light his hair. He used to do all kinds of crazy things. One day he was walking patrol, and he thought he would pull a round off, with the barrel under the water. The whole thing just split. The whole barrel!

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[3] See Chapter Three.

There were a lot of Durban guys there at 5 SAI, and there were lots of Durban guys in the mortars, so they were quite relaxed. I remember when we were going up to the border, one of the guys, Edgar Brighton (asked? – *ed.*): *How far are we from dying*?

THE BORDER

I spent six months on the border. I did Kwando on the Caprivi Strip for two months, Katima Mulilo for two months and Mapalela Island for two months

It was quite an experience; the whole group of guys. We went up there. We landed at M'pacha airport, and the light is so intense. The Major comes up to us and says; '*You guys, the enemy is not out there. The enemy is here amongst you. We lose more guys killing each other, than the enemy kills us*.' Then you start looking around. What is he saying? Then suddenly you get all the live ammo. It gets quite interesting.

We would just volunteer for everything, because it was easier to volunteer than to get the shit jobs. If there was a shit job going – volunteer. That way you would miss the next one. That was the theory.

There were about six of us in the group and we used to do all the shit jobs. '*Okay, I'm looking for six volunteers.*' '*Here we are*.'

There was a weird Ops in 1976 around the Kwando area. One of our platoons had gone out on patrol. They made a TB[4] and the next morning they had a herd of elephants chase through their TB. Straight after the elephants came a fire (an attack? – *ed.*), and suddenly it disappeared. They picked up their weapons and followed these terrs.[5] The Recces[6] had been fed information that these guys were being lead into a 150 man ambush, and we had to try and stop these guys. They sent a helicopter out, and it was shot down. The pilot was hit through his back – it was an Allouette. The flight sergeant managed to make it back to the base, but the pilot was killed.

We were guarding a very small temporary bridge, and suddenly this whole ops [group] appeared. A Super Frelon came in and picked us up, and we were told; '*Right. We need you guys*.' We climbed in the Super Frelon, and they flew us to Kwandu. As we landed, the whole chopper pad was just surrounded by dead terrs that they had brought in from the contacts. They had been there a couple of days already. They loaded us into the back of vehicles, on top of [mortar] bombs – 81mm bombs were just thrown into the back. When the ops was happening, everybody was just saying; '*Go Go Go*!' So we were sitting on this pile of bombs, driving through the veld to wherever we were going. There was chaos. You could hear the mortars being fired and exploding; you could hear the contact. You could hear one of those small Kudu planes flying as a spotter. It was all happening.

We were with this very young Loot, and he was lost. He took us in the wrong direction. We were going into Zambia, because the hook is right there, between Zambia and Angola. He took us into this wrong route. As we were

[4] temporary base
[5] slang: terrorists
[6] Reconnaissance commandos, or special forces.

going through, I got hit by a swarm of bees, and I was carrying this mortar barrel with this other guy. We both dropped it. I thought he had it, and he thought I had it. So when we got back to the *kaplyn,*[7] I said; '*Where's the barrel*?'

'*No, I haven't got it. I thought you had it*.'

Okay. We take three guys and we go back. We followed our tracks. We could hear the contact going on. Eventually we found the barrel. We were just about ready to turn around, when we found it and we carried it back. When we got back, they had all gone. So we thought that we had been left, because we saw the chopper going down and picking up guys, and off they went. We had no water with us at all. Every time a plane flew over, we were thinking that he was looking for us. This was over a long duration.

Eventually we heard some mortars, so we went up. We got to where they were, and Breytenbach was there [Lt Col Jan Breytenbach? – *ed.*]. He had a whole lot of guys with him. One guy had a red scarf and he was busy slapping our Loot around. One of the guys picked up his rifle – Breytenbach was really annoyed – he was very pissed off with this Loot because he had got us lost. He was going wild. I just couldn't believe seeing this guy, and seeing just how casual he was about war. This was his business, and here we were; we were just normal guys thrown into a situation, but this was his business.

They eventually hit this base where the ambush was, and I think that they found so many bags of mielie meal. That gave an indication of how many terrs there were. They took two volunteers. They said; '*Right. We can't bring the bodies back. Go and chop their hands off.*' Two guys were given the job; they had to go out and do that job.

Because we had made such a mess of our Ops, they sent us back by foot. We hadn't had water for something like three days. Everyone was dying of thirst. One of our guys got lost over the duration because it was another night trying to get back to the base. One guy was delirious and he went wandering off. We found him a week later. They had to send him back; he was totally *bossies*.[8] Eventually we got back to the base.

When I got there [to Mapalela Island], elephants would walk around the base. That was normal stuff. All they would tell you was; '*Don't walk there*', or '*Don't walk by yourself.*' Or '*When the elephants come, run like mad.*' We were told '*Just tap your magazine*' because this was Mapalela Island. The elephants used to come over on to the island. They said that if you walk into a herd of elephants, just tap your magazine. Don't run, don't do anything. But I think that if you walk into a herd of elephants, I think you are going to run. On the Caprivi you could see where they had been because of the big tracks.

I was petrified of snakes when I was on the border. I always used to come across the snakes. I saw some really mean snakes. I was standing beat one day. It was a Sunday and everybody was out. On Sunday we always used to have the wet rats.[9] They would try and make something special – custard and whatever. This snake came into the bunker. [Instantly! …] There was no-body there! I went up out of the bunker because the snake had come in. You can't

[7] cutline.

[8] 'bush happy', or mentally unstable, possibly PTSD.

[9] rations.

always tell whether it's a lizard or a snake, because they both have forked tongues, and their heads look exactly the same. This was a snake.

The guys got to know that I was afraid of snakes. One day I got into my sleeping bag, and I felt this ridge under the sleeping bag. I got up to have a look, and they had coiled up this snake, and put it under my sleeping bag to catch me. The lights were on – thank goodness! Otherwise I would have been feeling around there. They had killed it first. I was a Johannesburg boy and I was suddenly in the bush. The Natal guys were very close to nature. A lot closer to nature than we were.

When I was at Kwando – the police had been very active on the Caprivi before we had got there. Apparently one night they had someone who was cleaning the kitchens, and he actually paced out how far the base was to the waterside, and they revved it that night. And the first bomb landed in the canteen. The police had been very relaxed.

We used to hear about them having 'draws' with their 9 mms. They used to get so pissed in their pubs. It was just one long drinking session. You know what their border camps were like. They would get slammed out of their heads.

At Kwando we had a guy by the name of van Rensburg. His brother was the South African springbok discuss thrower. He was a very big guy. As a mortarist, I didn't see that much activity with patrols. We would always be there to protect the bases. These guys were out walking patrols and hitting contacts regularly. Van Rensburg hit a contact, and they stole a whole lot of AK-47 magazines, and they took the things home. Apparently this guy was a hero in this context – he stood up and he ran at them with his bren [gun]. We had a sergeant major from Ladysmith who didn't like this guy, and he punished him. You should have seen how he punished him. He had to flip tyres all day long, and then he had to dig a hole, that must have been about six foot square, and about eight foot deep, and they put a corrugated iron roof over it, and he locked him in there for about a week. They just took him water and basic food. They also used to punish the guys with *grootjass*-es.[10] They used to put the guys out in the sun, cover them with a *grootjas,* and then leave you in the sun, sweating.

When you're shooting mortars, and you shoot a round, and it's a dud – if you drop a bomb and it doesn't go off, you take it out, and you put it in a special place, and they'll take it and detonate it somewhere safe. One day this sergeant major came out and I think he had had too much to drink. He said; '*Hey, you. Mortar guys. I want you to shoot so many round there, and so many rounds in that direction, and then …*' So we started shooting these rounds for this guy. We ran out of bombs.

So he says; '*What about those ones over there*?'

'*No. Those are duds. We can't shoot those*.'

'*Shoot them*!'

'*No we can't shoot them. They're duds*.'

'*Shoot them*!'

[10] Greatcoats

So we shot them. The one just fell on the other side of the wall, and exploded. All the tents had holes in them. This 81mm mortar round just landed on the other side. I really don't know what happened to this guy. He was a real alcoholic.

I know of a situation where a vehicle flipped and a guy was trapped underneath his vehicle. We had to rush out to go and rescue this guy. He had had this big stick and he would hit the driver on his head; '*Go faster. Go faster*!'

I don't know whether he was meant to be in the army. He was a proper `PF!'

CAMPS

I almost did a full compliment of camps. I think I got out of one. I still feel guilty!

We were at Lohatla; we had the 52s there, we had the Ratels running up and down. They called the Loot and they said; '*Here's your RP*. (Reference Point) *And here's your target for the morning*.' So we drive, and the sun sets and it gets dark. We're going through with the Unimogs and the Ratels. We got to the place, and it was just rocks all over the place. Eventually we all climbed out. It was freezing cold. The guys were saying; '*We're not sleeping here. Look at this place. How are we going to sleep here? It's just rocks*.' Everybody was moaning.

In the distance we could see these lights coming towards us. We heard this Landrover coming up. I think it was a major who came running out. He was pale. He said; '*You've just moved on to our target. This is the target for the night*.' They were ready to start firing. If this guy hadn't turned his vehicle around, and they had seen the lights, we would have been gone. We would have been wiped out. That's how easily it happens. Just one error! The guy had mixed up the reference points. It was quite scary. And people say that the army has a certain factor – so many guys can die in training. I don't want to be a statistic.

The night I slept with a wrestler: We were doing training and there was this valley that we had to take our weapons through at night time. This whole valley was full of *haak-en-steek*.[11] When we eventually got to the other side and set our weapons up, the guys were ripped. They said; '*Okay. You have to sleep here tonight*'. The vehicles were just on the other side of the valley. '*No, I'm just not going back*.' It was like going back through hell. There were five of us, and one of the guys was a wrestler. All we had was a groundsheet. We decided that everybody would just gather together for body warmth, and we made it through the night like that. And in the morning, we said; '*Don't tell anyone*.'

One camp that I did; we didn't go in to bases; we made bases. We captured every single black guy who was in the area from the age of fifty down to the age of fifteen; we put [empty] sandbags over their heads, we brought them into the camp, into an enclosure, and we showed them to what they called `canaries' [informers], and these guys would point them [terrorist

[11] A particularly nasty kind of thorn bush.

suspects] out. We grabbed all of these guys – I don't know what they called this Ops. At that stage they sent one of our regiments in – I think it was the Irish, and when they hit that contact, they actually heard the Russians. They heard the guys shouting at them from the other side. These guys made a temporary base and they moved with dogs barking, and the vehicles, and they got hit with a major – it must have been a full company that hit these guys. There were tracers shooting, and they were shooting low down. I think we lost three guys in that contact. When they came back, and the Major said; `*We're going back*.'

Ops *Bedrog* – that was Simon Peresh – he came around, and P.W. Botha said "*We don't have any troops in Angola. Come with me and I'll show you.*" "*Hey boys, break your camps down, the inspectors are coming.*" We had to break all of our camps down, and we had to go in the bush, and hide under trees.

There were stories about certain terrorists, and when I was there, there were stories of a terrorist called 'Bigfoot'. This guy used to walk along the fences, so they couldn't follow his tracks. He would get to a fence, walk along the fence, and then climb off, and go walking off in a different direction. I remember when we used to have our Sit-Reps, they always used to talk about this Bigfoot, and eventually they nailed this guy. It was interesting that they knew exactly who each guy was, and more-or-less where he was, and how they were going to catch him.

I know when I was in Sector 10 – we were having breakfast and they called us out; '*We've got some terrs here*.' Everybody went out, had a look at them, checked their cammo out, checked out the two dead terrs, and then went back – had our breakfast, and carried on. It was just part of military life. You don't think; '*This was a living person*.'

I remember the last camp we did, it must have been in 1986, and when we came back, our Major said to us; '*The fight is not there anymore. The fight is here. There's no more fighting on the borders, defending South West Africa*.'

I spent three months there - ? Ruacana. It's so amazingly different to the rest of Owamboland. It was quite nice.

We had a really good bunch with us up there. They seemed to be a bit different up there. I lost touch with these guys. There were some very Afrikaans guys, and there were some English guys – quite a combination of guys – all in different aspects of life. We were doing camps now; one worked for the railways, one worked as a panel beater. You would hear all these stories when you got together around a campfire; everybody would get together and share their experiences, and their stories. It was great! That's one part of the army that I used to enjoy. I don't think that I ever went on a camp that I didn't enjoy. In fact I used to look forward to going on camps; I used to look forward to meeting the guys that I knew from previous camps, and I was disappointed if one of the guys didn't pitch. Everybody would get together and we would just carry on, and get on with it.

The one thing from the army that always came to me was that you could be having the greatest time, or you could be having the worst time of your life. That was the scary thing about being in the army. One minute you could be in a contact situation where it was a life or death situation, and the next minute you could be relaxing and having a beer. It was a very important part of our

lives, I think. I think that any 18 year old who doesn't go to the army really misses out.

STORIES I HEARD

It must have been 1975 when the guys went into Angola with 81mm mortars. The observer kept calling five rounds of HE, five rounds of phosphorous, five rounds of HE, five rounds of phosphorous. Eventually, when he came back to base, they asked him; '*Why were you calling such a strange combination of ammo*?' He said; '*Every time he would call HE, the guys would dive in their trenches. Then he would call phosphorous, the guys would jump out*.'

With the mortars, especially with the 81s, you would hear all the stories, about the anti-tank bomb that you can shoot with a mortar that will come down and go through the hatch. You hear all these silly stories.

Often when you get together with other army guys, and you're telling stories, the quietest guy will suddenly open up about a situation he was in, and it would be like something out of this world. I was at the Waterfront in Cape Town, and I met a guy who had been at 1 SAI. He got hit by phosphorous, and their whole Ratel went white. They hit this Ratel with some anti-tank weapon. The guys were stranded there. He just started telling this whole story about all that had happened. It was really scary. They were left there, and apparently everybody else moved out, and they were under fire constantly for hours. They had to stay until they were rescued. I can't recall which Ops this was on. You could be having a chat with a guy, and he'll just open up with some of his stories. I didn't see any really horrible things.

Chapter Five

M.J. le Roux
1 Special Service Battalion, Bloemfontein 1978 - 1979
Owamboland (Ondangwa, Etale, Oshivello),
Zeerust and early 61 Mechanised Battalion Group

PROLOGUE

These are just a couple of experiences during my 1978-1979 National Service for your Sentinel Projects. I have tried to recall the memories as accurate as possible but there may be some mistakes.

BASICS 1978 1SSB BLOEMFONTEIN

I am Afrikaans, grew up in a very conservative family. Really looked forward towards military training and saw it as a not-to-be-missed adventure.

At first I could not believe the amount of swearing that was going on and the fantastic frequency of insults everyone of us *rowers* [recruits] received from the corporals. After a short time all of us became part of this new culture and behaved similarly. My name changed from "Tinus" to "le Roux" for the next two years. Everyone was called by their surname.

Basics at SSB was tough (like all the camps) and it was the first time I saw people faint due to physical exhaustion. During daytime lectures it was a huge struggle just to keep awake, the heavy steel helmet jerked your head severely if you fell asleep while listening to the instructor. Some instructors threw stones at sleeping recruits to wake them up.

The 1 Parabat camp was next to ours. They did not like us. We did not like them. They came over the fence one night to steal our berets (for cleaning their boots they say). One bat got caught. He went to hospital.

One of my worst sights during basics was at the obstacle course. It happened when rowers were chased and rushed over the 3-4 metres high ladder-like obstacle. It was made from wooden logs. All the recruits had webbing with rifle and *staaldak* [helmet]. Everyone had to climb up the one side and jump down the other side. It was chaos as the guys trampled each other. One poor bugger landed with his upper leg on the flash breaker of another guy's R1 rifle. The rifle barrel pushed halfway up his leg. He was shouting non-stop. The medics came immediately and stretchered him away with the rifle still in his leg. We never saw him again.

The greatest army sin is when you lose your wife (rifle) while in the field. The corporals actually prowl at night to find arms while you are sleeping. This is why we always slept with our R1s in our sleeping bags.

ELAND GUNNERY TRAINING

This course was very intensive and we had to do a lot of study and tests. It was very interesting as we covered every piece of equipment in an Eland

turret; radios, intercoms, browning mg, 90mm gun, 60mm mortar, sights and all kinds of ammunition.

The highlight of this phase was the shooting of all these weapons at de Brug range. It is a fantastic feeling to fire the 90 cannon and the car rocks back due to the gun recoil.

One day there was a shooting accident at De Brug where a trooper was shot through the ankle with a browning. I remember how he jumped around holding his bleeding ankle. He was rushed away and we never saw him again.

TROOP TRAINING

We were finally divided into Squadrons (Companies) and troops (platoons). These would be the guys that we would live together with for the next 18 months. I was in B Squadron and the first troop. I was made crew commander of Charlie car. There were four Elands in a troop.

We were also introduced to our leadership group. Our troop leader was Lt Jacobs (Jakes) and our troop sergeant was Spikkels. Both PF, they wanted us to be the crack troop of the squadron. Spikkels was a total military nut case. He told us on the first night in our bungalow that he was on top of the ladder, then came God, and then all the other people.

We had quite a spread of South Africans in our troop. Myself and other conservative Afrikaners from Pretoria and farms, a couple of English speaking Joburg *jollers* and some English speaking Durban guys. We also had three fantastic Jewish guys; Cohen, Feinsinger and Frank. The English speaking guys called us Afrikaners *dutchmen*, *rock spiders* and *planks*. We called them *souties* [limeys] or *soutpiele* and sometimes *rooinekke* [rednecks]. It is amazing how different we were in the beginning and how attached we became towards each other after two years.

During this phase we learned and practiced all the skills in armoured combat necessary for border duty. We spent many days at De Brug where we practiced the different manoeuvres and we did a lot of live ammo practice.

We hated Spikkels without exception. Once Frank said something wrong. Spikkels hit him in the face and kicked him viciously while he was on the ground. He was so furious that he took us with wooden logs to De Brug in a Unimog. Every one of us had to carry a wooden log back to our camp at Tempe (+- 18 kilometres away). We knew this was total madness and we could do nothing about it. We were in a way worried about going to the border with such a madman.

OWAMBO 1978

Our Squadron was spread over the SWA border. One troop each at Ruacana, Ondangwa, Etale, Katima and some other place. Our troop was stationed first at Ondangwa and then Etale. We did patrols and other special tasks.

The ultimate goal for us on the border was to kill terrs. If an unfortunate terr got killed, the body was displayed and the camp celebrated. This sick principle of war slightly confused me sometimes because the Bible says you must not kill. I usually counter these thoughts with the knowledge that they wanted to kill me.

At Ondangwa our tent was called "Panzer Possi". It was a big double tent with a dartboard attached to one pole. One afternoon I was sleeping and woke up being darted in the leg by a trooper who missed the dartboard.

A couple of days after we arrived, we were paraded and announced that eight of our fellow B Squadron troopers were killed at Katima during an attack. Each name was read to us. There were also a couple of wounded. Trooper Lesh was with us and his twin brother was one of the dead. Our captain specially came down to inform Lesh but he just refused to accept the news. He told us laughing that it is not true and it is just a mistake, we don't have to worry. Lesh was taken away to the States for the funeral and he never returned. I accidentally saw Lesh after 20 years in 1999 at Moorreesburg, (he is a farmer) and we recalled that sad day.

Etale (at that time) was a small camp, the highest rank was major. There were only one or two companies of infantry and one or two troops of armour. I still remember the tremendous amount of liquor that was consumed. Every Saturday night was drinking time. My estimate is that at least 60% of the whole camp was in a tipsy to totally motherless condition on a Saturday night. Even the guards were in a happy state. Feinsinger (Jew boy) came one Saturday night to my tent in a very unsober condition and said a prayer to myself and my best friend Smittie to "our Christian God" to bring us home safe. Under our reserved laughter we so much appreciated this prayer.

Spikkels cooled off a bit, but got at us when he had a chance. Leopard crawling around Etale camp with sandbags and Eland tyre flipping in that amazing heat were some of his favourites.

One day on patrol, we were called to help an infantry patrol which was under attack in the Yati. We rushed there and came under attack ourselves. We could not see the attackers, but just the explosions around us. Our lootie with the infantry sergeant decided to counter attack and pursue over the border into Angola. This was illegal at that time. We did this and followed the terr tracks that went through a kraal. We bombarded and machine-gunned the kraal blindly. We wasted a huge amount of ammunition. We then turned around and headed back to the border. I felt so terribly bad after this incident because there must have been civilians in that kraal, we will never know. Only one of our infantry was hit in the leg. He had a flesh wound. When he recovered and returned to the camp, he proudly presented to everyone the AK bullet that was found in his leg.

Our biggest concern was landmines. We filled the wheels with water to help absorb energy of a landmine. We tried not to drive on veld roads that were not swept by the engineers. One of our cars hit a mine but luckily only the wheel was blown off. The crew commander and gunner were thrown clear of the car and the driver was trapped in his seat. All had bleeding noses and shock. The next day they were OK.

One day we had a vehicle break down in the Yati far from the camp. We could not do a field repair so we had to await the tiffies to bring parts and repair the car. We camped three days on the same spot. One day the lootie, Spikkels and some of the support troops did a patrol on foot around our campsite. They got hit. Four of them were wounded with one explosion including the Lootie and Spikkels. As next available rank, I was now in control. I ordered the remaining cars to secure the area of incident. I radioed

for support and gave our position with the casualty report. Spikkels had about five shrapnel wounds in his back. He still managed to walk but I picked him up with my car and drove him to the safe area, his blood dripping onto my car. Andrews had wounds on his chest, small, but you could see the bubbles forming while he breathed, he was unconscious. The other guy was hit in his bum. I remember he pulled down his pants with the blood coming down his ass. I thought the loot was dead because he had a big gash in his neck and lots of blood came out. His face was full of blood. Luckily we had a medic with us on patrol. I told the medic he must first treat the three other guys because the Lootie is dead. After the medic treated the three other wounded he went to the lootie and shouted we must bring drips, the lootie is still alive and so saved his life. Eventually the support arrived and a Puma [helicopter] came to pick up the wounded. The wounded were taken to the states. We never saw the Lootie again, the others later returned to us. I am so thankful that all these guys got 100 percent OK again and that their names were not added to the KIA lists.

Myself and my crew also showed some animal behaviour now. We refused to wash away the blood of Spikkels from the steel plates of my car. The pitch black spots of blood on the car, baked by the sun, was a reminder for weeks of how much we hated him and gave us a kind of revenge feeling.

Once we went to Oshivello to do special ops training. We trained to attack Swapo trenched camps with armour, infantry and artillery, all live ammo. Our loot gave us orders to write letters to our families and said that there will definitely be casualties amongst us in the coming ops because we will spearhead the attack. In the meantime I made friends with a cook. I gave him some AK bullets in exchange for two tins of chopped mixed fruit pudding. Myself and Smittie ate the tins of mixed fruit and I became ill with the worst kind of gippo guts that I have ever experienced (I think fear also contributed). I was put in a Unimog ambulance and transferred to a newly built hospital/sick bay at Ondangwa. The Unimog shook terribly and they made my head hang over the stretcher with a fire bucket underneath. Everything that was in my stomach ended up in the bucket. The sick bay at Ondangwa was a joke! There was not one of the medical people who helped me. Your friends had to look after you and bring your food. In the one corner of the sick bay there was a coffin standing, complete with silver handles! There were no toilets in the sick bay and I had to walk about 100 meters to the camp toilets in that soaring heat. By the time I reached the toilets in this pathetic state I was at the point of passing out. After two days I recovered, the Ops. was called off, and my unit returned.

We returned to the states a day before Christmas at Pretoria station after three days travel by train from Windhoek. We nearly got thrown off the train because we made stupid jokes with the conductor using our rifles.

I was so glad to see my mother and family and to hold them. My mother always cried when I arrived or left for camp.

2SSB 1979 ZEERUST, OWAMBO

In January 1979 we got transferred to Zeerust 2SSB Armour. Zeerust Camp was a PF paradise and we called it *"die poesplaas"*. We just hated the place with everything that went with it and up to today it gives me bad

memories. As *oumanne* [2nd year veterans] we had to do basics over for two weeks because we were declared as *"windgat"* [arrogant]. We received a new leadership group but they had not been to the border.

Some of the PF's families stayed with them in the camp. The one captain had a daughter of about 20 who also stayed in the camp. Her nickname was *"skroefie"*, I wonder why.

We went to Owambo again. This time we were stationed at Omathiya with the newly formed 61 Mech. Battalion. We were issued with Ratel 90's, much better than the Elands.

Our first Op. was to stop a band of terrs who got through to farms in SWA and killed some farm folks. The whole of the battalion was put to the chase and after some weeks all the terrs were killed. We moved around in farmland and the farmers were extremely friendly. They gave us everything we wanted.

My big buddy, Smittie, was in a way responsible for the death of two or three terrs when he fired a 90mm HE shell towards them while he was part of a stopper group. The terrs were wounded and could still move but a gunship chopper finished them of with their 20 mm gun.

That night there was a huge celebration party in Otavi ? with the bodies of the terrs displayed. The one terr had a 20mm HE shot to the head. Only the front part of his skull was left. Smittie was awarded a trophy for his part in the first kills of 61 Mech. Battalion.

For the first time I realized how brave the terrs were and how a tiny few of them kept a whole mechanized battalion busy for weeks!!

Our biggest threat at the 61 Mech camp were elephants. They tended to give guards in outside listening posts a huge fright when walking by. We were so far south of the Angola border that we never really felt threatened by enemy attacks, like being at Etale.

We practiced attacks on Swapo camps over and over but nothing of the real thing happened.

We [then] returned back to the *poes plaas* in Zeerust. Now we really had *min dae*. [Short Time] We did show-of-force ops to Messina and the Marico area. Myself and Smittie became extremely fed-up and could not stand this messing around and the inhumane personal insults from superior ranks anymore. Now we had enough of guard duty, inspections, egg powder food and army life.

Eventually the big *uitklaar* [check out] day arrived. We walked out of the camp and this chapter was now over.

AFTER ARMY DAYS

I went to *Tukkies* then to *Maties* and finished with my Masters degree in Rocket Engineering, working on the SA space programme for many years. For the past six years I have being running my own company in flour milling in Cape Town.

After 20 years myself and Smittie are still friends; we will never break the bond cast in those two years. Smittie is the owner of a huge computer company in Pretoria.

I tried to avoid camps because I thought two years was enough.

What a mental shock for me when I went to Namibia in 1991 to row the Orange river with my wife and friends and saw the enemy Swapo flag flying at the border post, and me obeying everything asked by their government officials? This confused me totally.

I concluded that the priority in life is your family, friends, and your own community. Your country is also important with some degree of loyalty, but you can change countries to suit your family needs. But I definitely say no to the "*to die for your country*" crap so easily uttered by politicians.

On the other hand, the new South Africa is so much more exciting and I really want it to prosper. I so much love this country and its peoples and have stopped to be negative by looking back. Now I try to look forward. Today I want to be identified as a builder of the new South Africa and contribute towards making it a better place for all of us and for our children's children.

WITH HINDSIGHT

I went to the army at 17 and *klaared* out after two years service, aged 19. From our original 150 Squadron members one out of every ten was either wounded or dead after the two years.

Was the two years conscription worth the while at that age? I would say, for my own case, yes. (If I was badly wounded or dead, of course no). At 17 or 18 you are not really conscious of the risks involved. For me, it was a huge kind of adventure. I have learned a lot of my fellow countrymen of different religions and culture and also learned to respect them.

You definitely learn a kind of responsibility. In the army you are on your own, it is your problem if you can't cope and there is no way out so you just have to cope.

The negative side was that in some way we were the executive instruments of politicians and were also in a position to be easily brainwashed by them. This happened so many times in history.

Twenty years ago we were heroes, now, without choice, we became the bad boys (apartheid protectors) in the modern history of South Africa…..

Now I remember the boy-men faces, my brothers in arms
We answered the call
For what reason at all?
How I miss you, my soldier friends
In my world of memory so clear
I can still see your fear
My poor brothers who never woke
Your faces didn't grow old
Why life was cheated from you so bold?
O my ghost friends in arms,
Rules of this world are grey
But we will still meet again one day

Chapter Six

Ferdi van Zyl
11 Commando, Kimberley 1979 - 1980: Keikanachab, 1 Reconnaissance Commando and Military Intelligence

BEFORE REPORTING

After I had finished matric, I went to study at the University of the Free State but by the time when I finishing my degree, patriotism got the better of me and I went off to do my stint of two years of National Service. In some way I looked forward to be doing it. Some of my friends in university had already done it and from their conversations I realized that they had experienced something that changed them in many ways. Political events in Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia as well as a thick dose of propaganda on the SABC television played a role in getting me charged up to do my bit for the Fatherland although it later turned out it was more likely for the National Party and the scheming Broederbond.

I had enjoyed my years in university to the proverbial brim of the glass and ended up in a poor physical shape, absolutely in no prime condition for serving the state. My brown call-up envelope with an enormous ominous looking `Official' stamped on it, contained instructions on how to get myself in a physical fit condition. I tried it a few times but I simply could not believe the army could be serious about me having to run a 2,4 km under 11 minutes. In the first week of basics I found out that they were dead serious and intended to prove it. I consequently suffered a lot.

INITIAL

In the early 70's when the first large scale call-ups started, everybody was still making a big fuss about the troop trains. Sometimes the town mayor would make a speech at the local station before the train pulled out. However by the time when I started my National Service, troop trains were no longer as important and the only official that I saw on Bethlehem station was the railway policeman keeping an eye on us to make sure we did not steal anything marked `SAR and Harbours'. Everybody was pretty quiet on the train, collectively we must have realized that the much feared basics had become a reality for us. The only humorous incident happened at Welkom station where a guy stood with a French Foreign legion kepi on his head and a six-pack of beers in his hand. When the corporal told him nicely (there were still parents and girlfriends around) that the beers would not be allowed on the train, he downed five of the beers on the platform, staggered onto the train and passed out.

That night when the train stopped in Kimberley all hell broke loose. A mob of instructors started to yell at us and it dawned on us that the rumours of the army were not only true but also understatements. A new recruit passed out from fear, he just keeled over, not that it really helped him for long. We

were bundled into Bedford trucks and driven to 11 Commando. The traditional `roofie' ride was not much of a success with the engine of the Bedford missing all the time (like all Bedford engines), and it could not really pick up any hair raising speed. The driver must have been intelligent for a driver, he then resorted to cutting corners so that the wheels would bump over the sidewalks and throw us around in the back.

BASICS

On the same night of our arrival we received most of our kit and many of us ended up with uniforms that did not fit. I had to go through basics with a pair of overalls with the crotch part hanging down between my knees. It would have been a rapper dream to have such an overall, but it was hell for me. To be able to march on one place with the knees lifted high, I had to hold the crotch part of my overalls up with my right hand. To an outsider I must have looked like some pervert groping himself like Eminem. We were also issued with R1 rifles with the newer plastic stocks, no longer the wooden FN models. I liked the R1 and shot better groupings with it than with the R4's that I used during later years.

After breakfast the next morning we were marched off for our medical examinations. This took a whole day and most of us ended up G1K1. It seemed that you should have vital limbs missing to be classified for administrative duties. Blood samples were taken to determine our blood types and the vials were placed on a trolley. As the line of troops slowly moved past the trolley one of them stared at the vials of blood and promptly passed out. He fell right across the trolley with hundreds of samples. It was chaos with broken glass and blood all over the floor. Many of us whose samples were smashed, had to fall in the line again. Luckily for the recruit who had passed out, it was in the days before anyone worried about blood infected with AIDS. The few female nurses who were working in the sick bay were far from attractive and they treated us like cattle but later during basics, just a fleeting glimpse of them was enough to turn us into drooling idiots.

During our first parade the commanding officer, made a welcoming speech in which he was very proud of the fact that 11 Commando was the unit with the highest number of casualties of our own troops in operational duties along the border. I was stunned by this, as I stared at the national flag behind him, I did not catch the humour or logic in his boasting about our deaths, I thought the main idea was to kill SWAPO and not our own troops.

We slept in enormous hangers that could accommodate up to three platoons under one roof. Dust and the occasional sparrow feather were always settling down on us and this made inspections rather difficult. About 200 m from the hanger was a white concrete slab fence. This was the `White Wall': a name that filled us with horror and loathing. We were forever running between some place on the base and that hated white wall.

The commanding officer was not often seen but his second-in-command (Major Bat Nel), was often riding around on his army issue, olive green, balloon tire bicycle, looking for idle troops to be scolded. The Regimental Sergeant Major was AO1 Blignaut, and although he was the scourge of the NCOs, the troops respected him. He was fair and professional and one of the few permanent staff members that appeared to be interested in our well being.

In one incident he had overturned food containers in the mess hall and ordered the cooks to produce better food for the troops.

The most brutish of all the instructors in the base was our platoon sergeant, Corporal Bosman. Nearly just as bad was his sidekick, Lance Corporal Botes, who might have had an inferiority complex for being an RTU (return to unit) from Oudtshoorn. He was a Bosman wannabe who shouted at us with a voice that sounded like a cheap squeaky toy. Bosman was later replaced by Corporal Warden, who was well trained in the Bosman methods and acted like one of his clones, consequently things did not improve for us. What amazed me most about training was that we were constantly being degraded by instructors who acted as if we were the enemy. Patriotism and morale building were virtually non-existent, we swore and hated everything that resembled our own army. Our frustrations sometimes led to fights that resulted in a few bayonet wounds. Luckily the R1 bayonet was a blunt thing and not very practical to use as a knife for sticking into fellow recruits when you hated the instructors. Our most venomous remarks were aimed at the silly posters that proclaimed things like `Sweat spilt now means less blood later'. Where did they find morons who could dream that up?

About a month before the end of basics, we received a new platoon sergeant, Corporal Keulder. He had come back after a long spell on the border and he possessed a rare knowledge and method of instruction that inspired trust and motivation. He did not say much but when he spoke it was well worth listening to. We learned a lot from him and our platoon won the evaluation at the end of basics.

Church parade was an eye-opener for me. On the first Sunday I went to the Dutch Reformed (NG) church where the new intake had to sit in the front part of the church. Due to lack of sleep during training, as well as the pro-Nationalist Party propaganda, we all had one hell of a time trying to stay awake. This lack of attention to his sermon totally infuriated the chaplain. He yelled like some old-testament judge at us to stand up. He then ordered our instructors to keep us awake and their solution was to walk up and down in the church while the chaplain droned on. Any recruit who dared to fall asleep got his ears clipped. Meanwhile the permanent force members and their families were sitting in the back of the church tittering at the unfortunate recruits. The name "House of God" just did not seem right to me in that church. After that Sunday I went to church parades of the other groups like Anglican, Hervormd, Gereformeerd, Catholic, or whatever church but never again to the Dutch Reformed.

It might have been due to the RSM's daily mess hall inspection that the food was not bad, but we never had time to enjoy it. While we were waiting for the cooks to dish out our meals, the corporals were already outside shouting for us to form up in our platoons. Due to lack of space in the mess hall we had to sit tightly pressed against one another, except if you were anywhere near Boertjie. He never really talked to us but only grinned at us and the instructors. He could not really eat without wasting half of it due to his spastic movements. Sitting near him meant that your clothes would be covered with pumpkin or rice. Most of the recruits always tried to help him wherever they could. I think it was our way of showing ourselves that we were still human and had not fallen to the level of gang of instructors. After a

month he was sent home as not trainable, we were all happy for him and wishing him well for escaping from the hell hole but the amazing thing was he really looked sad to be leaving the platoon. Makes one wonder about the value of the medical exam on the day before basics started.

The shooting range was about 20 km away and called Blyvooruitsig [Happy outlook]. It never was a happy occasion for us as we had to do a forced march to get there and then it turned out to be 80 percent punishment drill and 20 percent actual shooting. An amusing thing that happened there was that while we were on the shooting point, Lance Corporal Botes fired a shot from somewhere behind the shooting point, over the people in front. RSM Blignaut descended on him like a fury and for the rest of the day we could hear him do ammo box punishment drill. During this outing to the shooting range I nearly had my head blown off by a friend of mine. Our group had just finished shooting and were standing somewhere to the rear when he turned to me and started to say "*This R1 is*....." At that moment he had the rifle pointed at me with the muzzle about one metre from my face, when a shot went off. The muzzle blast was in my face and for years afterwards my left ear distorted like some cheap loudspeaker when I listened to loud sounds. Luckily for my friend, who had fired the shot, the troops on the shooting point were going full out with a rapid volley and the instructors did not hear his shot, not that I could hear them myself.

Right next to 11 Commando was a Maintenance Unit of blue berets who did not seem to have such a bad time. When it was too hot for training, a flag was normally hoisted to show that all training had to be halted to prevent troops getting heat stroke. We often saw the flag up in the camp of the Blue Berets but ours never appeared. Could it really have been warmer in their camp than in ours or did 11 Commando believe they could write off fatalities as part of training?

By the end of Basic Instruction it was time for Phase 2. Recruiters came from other units looking for gung ho troops who wanted to go to the Parachute battalion, Dog Squad, Junior Leaders etc. Being one of only four graduates in the whole intake in 11 Commando I was originally earmarked for Oudtshoorn but I was having trouble with an injured knee and I made the mistake of asking the recruiting officer if I could go somewhere else. He cracked up at my audacity to question his wisdom and I was sent out of the room without an answer but with vague threats that he would make "notes" in my file about my negative attitude. I finished Phase 2 in 11 Commando and was afterwards sent to Pretoria to work for Director Special Operations in the Zanza building.

PRETORIA

On arriving in Pretoria I was taken to the living quarters at Defence Headquarters (DHQ) but two hours later I was told to pack again and ended up at Personnel Service Corps (PSC) to do a course. Right across the street from Personnel Service Corps was the Army College. We sometimes stared at the permanent force officers doing courses there and wondered how low a person had to be, to end up there. What I never realized at that time, was that I would also be a PF doing Officers Course at Army College one day. Most

national servicemen viewed a permanent force member as the lowest of life forms, something similar to the primordial slime.

Training at PSC was nothing if compared with what we did at 11 Commando. However something totally new to me, was the permanent boning (excessive polishing) of boots by recruits who spent all evening with pieces of cotton wool and polish to get a glass like layer on their boots. Months of running through the thorns and rocks on the mine dumps around Kimberley had permanently ruined my boots, even my corporal agreed that it was impossible to bone my boots. Most of the PT consisted of running around in the streets of Voortrekkerhoogte, something that was much more interesting than the veld around Kimberley. During one of these runs the last guy in a platoon was struck and killed by lightning. A week later one of the instructors was so insensitive as to suggest that he was killed as divine punishment for not keeping up with the platoon.

After a month I was back at DHQ and was told to report at the Director Special Operations. I was taken to the commanding officer who told me that he had not asked for a new National Serviceman, that he did not have a job for me and that I did not have the necessary secret security classification to work there. He told me to go to the tearoom of the national servicemen and to wait there while he would try to find out why I had been sent to his unit. For two weeks I went to the unit each morning and had to sit all day in the tearoom waiting for news about where I had to go. My boredom ended when I received a telephone call from DHQ informing me that I was going to South West Africa.

SOUTH WEST AFRICA

A platoon of us were flown in a C130 from Waterkloof to Windhoek. The flight was long and noisy and by the time we landed it was already late afternoon. We were loaded onto Bedford trucks and driven off into the night. We stopped at a German café in the outskirts of Windhoek and were told that it was the last chance to buy food for the road. I ended up with something that resembled a large polony but turned up to be raw liver set in a spicy jelly and a white bread. After our stop we were driven south to Keikanachab, about 20 km south west of Mariental. We were totally isolated from civilians and the only thing that reminded us of civilian life were the distant lights of vehicles on the highway that we could see at night time and the occasional visit to us by someone from Mariental Commando who brought our supplies. We had no connection with the outside world except for the occasional letter that we received or wrote. This was a prisoner of war camp for captured SWAPO terrorists. The camp consisted of a double barbed wire fence of about three metres high around tents for the prisoners and guard towers on the corners. There were shallow trenches outside the wire for `*klaarstaan*'. It formed a square with each side about 100 m long. The camp was supposed to be a secret place and we were not allowed to mention it in our letters. The prisoners were treated well and always appeared friendly. I never saw any mistreatment of any kind and when we did not do guard duty, we spend most days playing soccer matches against the prisoners or tanning in the sun listening to Esme's radio requests for the troops.

During that time the old NASA space station, Skylab tumbled back to Earth. It was calculated that it would most probably come down over either South West Africa or the South Atlantic. Where we were normally wearing bush hats, we were told to wear steel helmets for that day. I could never decide whether that was army humour or plain stupidity.

The peace and quiet was shattered one night when a burst of automatic fire woke everybody up. We rushed to the trenches to repel the `attack' but nothing came of it. In the end it turned out that one of our own guards had played with the safety catch of a WWII vintage Bren that was fixed on a tripod on top of a guard tower and it had fired a full magazine through the roof of one of our tents. One of the sleeping troops could not find his R1 in the dark during the rush and he was later found standing in a foxhole, totally naked and only armed with the cleaning kit pull-through in his hand. He might not have killed a SWAPO attacker with it, but certainly could have cleaned his AK-47 for him.

Some time later the security police came to inform us that they had captured a terrorist in the area and it turned out that SWAPO knew about the camp. This meant there was the possibility that SWAPO might try to set the prisoners free and from that time onwards we had to start walking patrols to look for tracks in the area. We only once found suspected tracks nearby which we followed for a day but the police took over from us and we returned to camp. During one of these foot patrols I discovered beautiful Iceland spar calcite crystals of an exceptional clear quality and as large as a man's fist. There was no attempted escape during my time at the camp.

After three months we were told that we were to be replaced by another platoon. The camp [guard duty] was considered to be an operational service and a commandant would arrive on our last day to hand out Pro Patria medals. We did not get any, [as] it turned out that when he arrived, he decided our hair was too long for his liking and he got in his Landrover and drove off with our Pro Patrias. I received mine later in the mail.

4 SAI MIDDELBURG

On arriving back at Director Special Operations, the OC called me into his office and finally told me I had to go to 4 SAI (Middelburg) to help a person who was doing a research project on leadership in the Reconnaissance Commando Units. At 4 SAI, I moved into a bungalow with HQ Company and I worked in the town with the person who did the research project. She was Mrs van Nieuwenhuizen, the wife of a local Dutch Reformed minister. He was an amazing person and the first to explain to me how the Broederbond manipulated politics in the country. Mrs Van Nieuwenhuizen's research consisted mostly of literature research. I had to read through stacks of literature on anything that concerned leadership. Most of this was boring stuff but there were also interesting works by military authors like Von Clausewitz or about leaders like Rommel, Patton etc. I did not stay very long at 4 SAI and was glad to leave, it was a depressing place with lots of cannabis smokers, AWOLs and only cold showers although it was a freezing winter time on the Transvaal Highveld. The only memorable person was the RSM who was rumoured to be the real Killer Smith who according to an army urban legend,

had killed his brother's son during punishment drill. The RSM had wrists as thick as my knees.

1 RECONNAISSANCE COMMANDO

Mrs Van Nieuwenhuizen's husband became the chaplain for 1 Reconnaissance Commando and they moved to Durban and into a house next to the lighthouse on the Bluff. She was still busy with her research and I had to work in an office in the administration building of 1 Reconnaissance Commando. Her research did not appeal to most of the Reconnaissance Operators. They knew what was important in a leader and what worked for them and did not like a civilian asking silly questions about leadership issues. There were about thirty other national servicemen (NSMs) in the unit, mostly parachute packers, store men or clerks.

The CO was Commandant Swart and the adjutant was Major Dippenaar. The adjutant was blind and missing fingers from a detonator explosion but he had an amazing memory. He was helped by his clerk, Cpl Coetzer who was typical Personnel Service Corps, he boned his boots and wore chains in the inside of the bottom of his pants to keep them straight, it also might have helped Maj Dippenaar to hear him moving around. The RSM was AO1 Pep van Zyl who looked quite fierce with an enormous moustache, a typical sergeant major belly and a booming voice. The NDP's respected him and we knew that as long as we did your work properly and looked smart, he would be fair and amiable. The scourge of the NSMs was the Base Sergeant Major, AO1 Kruger. His pet hate in life appeared to be National Servicemen. Once he had his sadistic eyes fixed on you, you knew you were in for a very bad time.

The permanent force members of the unit and the national servicemen did not really socialize, both groups kept to their own. We were not allowed to wear their maroon coloured berets but retained our own from the units where we came from. During one incident a small group of NSMs went to a bar where they got beaten up by the civilians. When the permanent force members heard about this incident, they claimed that it was their privilege to "bliksem" the civvies and said that the NSMs had brought shame on the unit. One good thing that came out of this incident of the fight with the civilians was that the worst troublemaker of the NSMs (Private Meyer) ended up in hospital with a knife wound in the neck. When he came out of hospital he was forever a changed person, as meek as a lamb. It might have been due to some brain damage or he might even have seen the bright shining light in a near death experience.

There was a rumour that the civilian base handyman was a relative of Tessa of the photo storybooks fame. A girl vaguely resembling her sometimes visited him and although she was not as tall as in the books, wore a thick plastering of makeup on her face and wore normal clothes and not her habitual bikini, our two years in the army made her look like some Nordic goddess.

On Friday afternoons nearly the whole unit had to participate in the Commandant's Run, which consisted of running a circular route around the Bluff. It was about 8 km long and consisted of a winding road on top of the ridge of the Bluff where we had a glorious view over Durban's Bay area. When we reached the lighthouse near the end of the bluff we turned right and went down a steep hill past a sewage plant with an ghastly smell. You had to

close your mouth when running past that part if you did not want to swallow the flies that were attracted to the sewage plant. At the bottom of the hill, next to the beach was a road that passed an old whaling station, then up against the side of the Bluff and back to the unit along a road.

A group of us did a lot of snorkeling in the ocean next to the old disused whaling station. The sea floor was littered with lead sinkers from the fishermen who had fished there before the area was taken over by the army. We collected these lead sinkers and traded it with the parachute packers who then made us articles like sleeping bags inners from old parachutes. One day the commandant warned us that the Air Force had phoned him and said that when they flew their daily patrols, they not only saw us swimming around in the sea but also enormous sharks on the other side of the breakers. It did not keep us out for long but we tended to keep to the shallow parts after that.

After office hours we often had to do guard duty at the gate that separated the bluff from the civilian residential area next to us. There was a small guard hut but nobody dared to stand inside it. Someone had committed suicide inside it and the ceiling was still spattered with what looked like dried blood. Apparently the BSM decided that it should stay that way to teach us some lesson of a kind. One midnight a completely naked women ran past the guards, down Marine Drive. This totally confused them because she was not covered by stars like the Scope girls. After about 20 seconds a equally naked Portuguese man ran up to the gate and asked in heavily accented English: "Where did she go?"

Cpl Wayne Clarke the military policeman in the unit and Cpl Pierre Halle the PTI and myself were once taken by Landrover to an old steel railway bridge near St Lucia where we had to pretend to guard the bridge for a week. This formed part of a training course on camouflage and demolition for new reconnaissance operators. It turned out to be a real treat for us and we ended up drunk for a week on Ijuba, (the Zulu beer that was sold in litre sized cartons). We dived from the bridge, and tried to catch fish although our lines were always snapped by something big. Our water sports suddenly came to a stop when a police patrol stopped there and warned us about the large number of sharks and crocodiles in that part of the river. At the end of the week we received a message to move back to a bridge at the North Coast Highway where we would be picked up. We sat there all day long without our promised lift and by night we had finished the last of the Ijuba. We also had many plastic glow-sticks left. Corporal Halle activated about five, cut them open and smeared himself from head to toes with the glowing liquid. With his body shining a bright green light he then went to the highway where he tried to get a lift. Needlessly to say nobody stopped for this green human glow-worm. We tried to sleep but the light shining from him kept us awake for a while. I never saw him after national service again and for all I know he might have developed a third eyeball from the chemicals of the glow-stick. Although we never saw the reconnaissance operators during that week at the bridge, they later showed us photos that they have taken of us, some were from as close as two metres. They were either brilliant with their camouflage and movements or Ijuba had left us blind and deaf.

RHODESIANS

During my second year, many Rhodesians who had left their country, arrived in Durban and some of them joined 1 Recce Commando. They were a friendly lot and did not have the general animosity against national servicemen that our own permanent force members showed. It was nice talking to them and from their conversations I realized how tough things had been in their country. The Rhodesians were later formed into 6 Reconnaissance Commando but they shared the base with us during that time. When they prepared for their first big operation somewhere, they loaded trucks for days with anything that they could get onto them. It looked more like some safari with a "Dr Livingstone I presume" atmosphere to it.

CHECKING OUT

Just before my two years of service came to an end, AO1 Kruger decided that the national servicemen had to be taught a lesson for old time's sake. At our 40 days party someone had kicked a toilet to pieces and the culprit did not come out in the open about this. Every morning after that party, except for Sundays, we had to report at the beach at 6:00 where we did PT for an hour with anything as unyielding as Unimog tyres to railway ties (sleepers). We had to do this until our very last day in the unit but he never found the culprit. This was some of the worst PT that I have experienced in my army days and we ended up bruised and swearing at the objects that we had to lug around in the loose beach sand.

On our last day we had all our documents signed, said goodbye to our friends and were given a farewell message by Commandant Swart. We then received a message that AO1 Kruger wanted the national servicemen to report for a final drill parade but we jumped in our vehicles and drove off. At the gate the pioneer (an old soldier, who seemed as if he still suffered from shell shock after Tobruk), told us that he received a message from Kruger not to let us through. In the end we convinced him and by the time Kruger arrived at the gate, we were already gone and free at last.

CAMPS, PERMANENT FORCE AND SANDF

Two years later I did my first camp with a Citizen Force Unit (Regiment Louw Wepener), at a field base of the 2 Field Engineers (Bethlehem). It was called Piet-se-gat, in the mountains between Bethlehem and Clarens. This was the coldest three weeks of my army career. I have been a teacher for four years in the far northern parts of Canada but even these temperatures (which can go down to - 40 deg C), are not as bad, due to the use of heated buildings and protective clothes and gear. The SADF browns, sleeping bags and bungalows were never designed to protect against extreme cold. The temperatures during those nights in the eastern Free State went down to - 10 deg C but we did not have great coats, only a bush jacket and a stretched army jersey. At night when we slept shivering, our exhaled breath formed condensation in the freezing temperatures.

During another one of these freezing camps in the eastern Free State, I ran into AO1 Kruger again. It was during another freezing cold camp at Ladybrand that I was awoken by by his shouts one morning. He was dubbed

"*Rooimoer*" [Red Rage] by the Citizen Force troops but it seemed as if he had lost some of his old vigour. He did not recognize me and I stayed as far as possible away from him.

I did a few courses at Smidtsdrift and Danie Theron Battle School in Kimberley and I saw that 11 Commando no longer existed. It was replaced by Army Intelligence School. The old bungalows were still standing but the hated white prefabricated wall had gone. They should have sold parts of it to ex-members of 11 Commando.

After teaching in Pretoria for a few years I decided that I needed more excitement than looking after misbehaving teenagers and I joined Military Intelligence in 1987. As a permanent force member I did my officer's course at the Army College, across the road from the Personnel Service Corps where I had stood a few years before, hating permanent force members. I worked most of the time in the Liberty Life building and did courses at SAMIC and Walmansthal. Military Intelligence was an amazing place to work at and I met wonderful people who were working there or who did courses with me. However after Namibia became independent, things started to wind down on the military side and I went back to teaching again.

By the time that the SADF had became the SANDF, I was teaching in Bethlehem and worked for Bethlehem Commando as the Intelligence Officer. Although we had good times camping and doing patrols along the Lesotho border, it was also the time when we experienced the horrors of brutal farm attacks in that area. By 2001, I became convinced that FW de Klerk's total surrender of power had left us with no control over our political future and I emigrated with my family to Canada.

AND NOW?

Most of us did not have any fantasy about going home after National Service to a hero's welcome by a grateful nation. We were after all brought up in a society where National Service was made out to be a duty, and things like the showing of emotions were frowned upon. Arriving home we discovered that when talking to outsiders about rat-packs, bivvies or inspections, they did not fully understand these concepts or realized why we wanted to talk about it in the first place. Talking too much about your army days also led to you being tagged us `*army-bedonnerd*'.. Many of us heard within the first week of being home, `*When are you going to look for a job*?' So much for appreciation.

Many years have passed since my involvement in the SADF but I often think back to the days in `browns' my wonderful friends and hilarious situations that we had shared. I no longer hate the sadistic types that I have described, they were the minority and the rest of us have proofed in the end that we had more human decency in us. National Service also taught us much more than just how to be a soldier, it gave us life skills that still distinguish us, even after all these years, from others. National Service was also the melting pot that taught Afrikaans and English speakers that we were not that different after all. We made friends, depended upon and placed our trust in each other. National Service also took us out of our sheltered worlds and we ended up in a platoon that was a kaleidescope of different people and it was up to you to get along with anyone, in the end most of us did.

I was one of the lucky ones, I came back whole from National Service, both mentally and physically, without wounds or nightmares. Many others did not come back. Looking at the long list of casualties and reading the dedications to them, forces one to reflect that there was also a very sad and tragic side of National Service. There is also an even longer list of those who were damaged, both physically and mentally by what they had experienced as young 19 year olds, thrown into a vicious African war with images more real than what Hollywood can dream up.

Chapter Seven

Dennis Finch
11 Commando, Kimberley 1978 - 1979
Etale, Okatope, Nkurunkuru and Grootfontein

Introduction

Dennis was called up to do his National Service with 11 Commando (Kimberley) in January 1978. Trained as an infantryman, on Vickers machine guns, he was then posted on operational service to South West Africa, and walked patrols near Etale Base, and around Okatope, where he was involved in a contact. Later he served at Nkurunkuru Island near Rundu and later at Grootfontein. Following the completion of his National Service in December 1979, he completed several camps with the Citizen Force before joining the Permanent Force to do catering at Natal Command.

BEFORE REPORTING FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

I had elder friends who had been in the army, so obviously you listen to their stories, which are a bit scary about the corporals chasing you about. One particular friend always said that if you had to run, make sure that you didn't run in the front or at the back. Just be obscure. In the middle. I followed that advice. It was pretty handy actually. It was a bit scary about what to expect. The unknown. None of those who told me about the army had ever been in action or seen action.

I didn't actually have to go to army because I have a British background. I didn't really have to go. My older brother didn't go, so I didn't have to go. I felt that I had taken from the country, so must give back to the country. That's what my feeling was. I registered when I was 15 or 16 at school. I was born in South Africa, but I could have got a British passport because my father was British and my mother was Rhodesian, and all my family are British, so I could have got a passport and just buggered off, or just told them that I was British and didn't have to do it. All my friends went to the army, so I though it was the thing to do. I'm still pleased that I went, although two years against two years for someone who didn't go to the army was a big loss. You could maybe have made different decisions, which could have changed your whole life completely. I don't know. It's difficult to say. I'm pleased that I went.

My intake was January 1978. We went up by train from Port Elizabeth to Kimberley. I was with all my school mates as well, so we were supportive to each other. Getting to Kimberley, we had the famous *roofie* ride from the station to the base, getting all of our kit and having to carry our *trommels* (storage chest), our mattresses and everything all together with our *balsak* (equipment bag) to the bungalows. That was pretty hairy as well.

11 COMMANDO

There's always competition between all the different units, and they tried to keep up the high standards and discipline. The discipline was pretty harsh – I thought anyway.

I did my basic training. A sergeant major that stood out was Sergeant Major Shaeffer who was an English guy, and he was very fair. He was quite a good guy. Sergeant Major Du Plessis who could look right through you with his big blue eyes – a very scary guy. Later on he became an officer. Tilley Smit – a lot of people will recognise that name, [was] the RSM – the shortest sergeant major I've ever seen, but he had a big voice on him. He was a very nice guy. Very fair! He earned a lot of respect from the troops. He was great.

We did a lot of route marches in basics. A lot of marches to the *skietbaan* (shooting range). We had a lot of *opvoks* (punishment sessions). I think that most people know that going to the *skietbaan*, and after the PFs left, the national servicemen corporals and lieutenants would carry on after training and give you quite a lot of PT. Not me, but a few guys who needed some extra lessons, had to carry ammo, the *kas* (case), between the one hundred and the two hundred and the three hundred and even up to the thousand metre [mark] – I've seen guys running with ammo *kasses*. Full ones, of course. Also doing *baba-dra* and *skaap-dra* (baby and sheep carry) and rolling in between the different fire positions; the hundred and the two hundred metre positions. That was one of the favourites.

The other thing that stands out for me is getting our food where you would have your Dixie – everything; your porridge, your boiled egg or your scrambled egg and your cornflakes and whatever all mixed up into the same Dixie. To try and keep the other one clean you would put it all together. There were a few times when we used them over a fire, and we got back to base, late say on a Sunday night, and we were expected to have clean dixies for inspection the next morning. One particular period where we didn't do it, and everybody in my platoon hadn't cleaned their dixies for inspection the next morning, and at the end of training that day, at half past four we had to *tree aan* next to the Bedfords which were full of poles, and we were taken to the Orange Free State Border, which was seven kilometres away, and we had to run back with the poles, three or four guys to a pole. In between there was other PT as well; push ups and sit ups with the pole. It took two and a half hours to get back. That's one of the things that stands out.

A lot of the guys were at school with me, and before we went for haircuts you could recognise them, and afterwards you couldn't recognise them until you got back to the bungalow because their heads were shaved. There were a few guys you were buddies with, but after basics they chose their different sections that they wanted to go into. One guy, Wayne – he was a pretty good pal, but he went to the horse school. One friend – both of us used to enjoy the 2,4. He won quite often and I beat him occasionally, but in the last 2,4 of basics I managed to beat him. I got tired like everybody else, but I felt that I was pretty fit to take any punishment. I could last for an hour or a two hour *opvok* – I wouldn't come off too badly because I was fit before I got to the army.

Another chap, Rhodes Featherstone, was with me in basics. He was actually called up for the Air Force, but one day we found him chasing down the road, and he came running past me with a pole on his back. He had been relocated from the Air Force to 11 Commando because they didn't have enough troops there. He was a good friend from school. I met him when we were in junior school although he wasn't in the same school as me.

After basics I did a Vickers machine gun course, which was a nightmare with the 95 pound weight. Carrying this thing around wasn't funny. Corporal Sean Bourne – when all of the guys on the specialist phase, like the mortars and the 106s would all be relaxing, we always seemed to be running. That was really tough. The Vickers machine gun that we started training on, the belts were made from material, and the belts or the machine guns themselves actually had 1915 stamped on the side. They had 250 rounds per belt, and when you've shot out all your belts, you have to reload them yourself. A lot of them weren't in good condition considering the age, so you would get a lot of *storings* – stoppages, and 10 to 1 there was always a corporal or somebody behind you who would hit you on your steel helmet with a stick if you weren't fast enough getting your stoppage sorted out.

I didn't choose to do the Vickers course. It was chosen for me. After basics, they *treed* the whole company *aan*, and said '*Anyone who wants to be drivers, stand that side. Anyone who wants to be storemen, stand over there, mortars, stand over there*.' All the guys who wanted to do mortars, would then have to do drivers, and anyone who wanted to be drivers would have to do mortars. It was totally confused. The other thing they used to do, was to say; '*We only need 10 guys to become storemen*', and there was 50 guys standing there. '*Run to the end of the parade ground. The first 10 who come back will be storemen.*' The guys would run their arses off because they wanted to be storemen, and they would then take the last 10. Nobody ever wound up in what they wanted. I took my friend's advice, which didn't work out very well this time. I actually got the worst of the worst which was the Vickers machine gun. I didn't volunteer for anything, and there were 15 of us left over who hadn't volunteered for anything. '*All of you guys, you're going to do Vickers*.' Oh, no! With the worst bloody corporal in the whole company, as well!

One day we were all in the hall, and they called all of the guys who had a Standard 8 to come out of the hall, and all of us went out. They said; '*Go and pack your bags. You are all going to Jan Kempdorp. They need extra troops there*.' Within an hour we were all on a truck on our way to Jan Kempdorp, and that's where I did my bush phase, with Corporal Nagel. I can't remember my Loot's name now. Corporal Nagel was from Philippi in the Cape. He used to stutter. Our RSM was Sergeant Major Ickermann, and his name is pretty well known in the army from those days. We just suffered and suffered and suffered. We went to Smitsdrift and just had a really hard time there.

At Jan Kempdorp I remember that we used to have to stand to attention and they would throw thunder flashes in between us, and you would be trying to get a drink, and they would throw thunder flashes or tear gas at us. Two unpleasantries. The cold showers … Standing guard three hours on and three hours off, specially when you had a full day's training ahead of you, or when you had just been through a full day of training, and then they would come

and pick you up before you would stand guard, so you would only get two or three hours sleep maximum a night. That was a bit tough.

It was so cold at night that the railway lines used to make a tremendous noise, and I've never heard that anywhere else. It was a real loud cracking noise. The guys used to stand quite far apart, so you would be on your own. A few stories that I heard from guys who were there before me, of standing guard and stones would come flying at them from inside the base, but there shouldn't have been anybody inside the base, because it was the ammunition depot. They reckoned that there were a few ghosts around there. Who knows? Those were some of the hairy stories. I think we were more cold than anything else, too cold to worry about anything else.

So we finished that, and we did evaluation in front of the Sergeant Major of the army at that time. Then we flew off up to Grootfontein, and Oshivello where we carried on with our training, and we would be evaluated again before you could go on up to the border. I did a course there. I did a Browning 7.62 course, which I think was the only time that I actually volunteered for anything. It turned out to be a nightmare. Everytime you shot about half a belt you had to run and go and put out the fire that it caused in the bushes. In between the bushes where the mortars and things that hadn't gone off [*lay*]. You were busy putting these things out …

The author during his National Service.

Kimble McDonald (left) and the author standing inspection at Jan Kempdorp.

A chap from Mooi River, Rhodes Featherstone and the author at Jan Kempdorp.

We were in Oshivello, I think it was the 23rd of August, when Katima Mulilo base was attacked and a missile landed on one of the troops' bungalows and killed nine (*sic*) of them.[12] That was in August 1978. We actually heard that on the radio, so we were shitting ourselves before we even got up to the border.

I didn't carry on with [the] Vickers. I went from Kimberley where I had done the Vickers Course to Jan Kempdorp, so I didn't carry on with [the] Vickers after that. A Vickers section did go up to the border, but not with me.

ETALE BASE, SECTOR 10

After passing our evaluation, we went up to Etale. There were two Etales. The old Etale, which was about 16 or 17 kilometers away from the border. It was quite a nice base, I remember. When we left Grootfontein (*Oshivello*? – *ed.*), we drove up in *langbakke* Samils, and when we got to Etale, we were the first platoon to go out on patrol, so we didn't actually go into the base at all until about three weeks later. We had to hand our kit in outside the Etale base. As we arrived there, our Company had to take over from the Company that was there already. Those guys got onto the same trucks that we had come in, and they left. Not all of the platoons went out on patrol straight away, but we were one of the first ones to go out on patrol to relieve the guys who were coming off from the border. We wound up handing all of our *balsaks* in from outside, and getting all our ratpacks, camouflage - `black is beautiful' camouflage, and we would up going on patrol straight off. The same day that we were in Oshivello, we were actually on patrol. This was [with] the Loot[13] that we had trained with in Oshivello and basics.

They went off with us and it was all very *paraat* (gung-ho), debussing off the *Buffel* in the bush and doing the *rondom verdedeging* (all around defence) as you were trained, and then walking a three week patrol in the same clothes, same rations. We got there in August, and by the time we left in December everybody including the Loot and the corporal were pretty *nafi*.[14] We really hadn't seen any terrorists. The occasional boot print [only]...

We walked patrol in a very dry area around Etale. It was summer, so we had some times when it was really raining hard, and the *shonas* would be full of water. We could actually swim. There was a time when we were playing rounders on the Yati itself, with our shirts hanging off bushes. After playing I picked up my shirt and put it on, and I had to rip it off straight away because a little scorpion had got in my shirt, and it stung me under my left armpit. It was sore, but I'm glad that it wasn't poisonous. I'm still here today. I told the Loot and the medic, but there wasn't any swelling. It wasn't a big thing. I'd been brought up in a farming area as a kid, so I've been bitten and scratched many times before, so it wasn't a big thing for me.

We did a lot of OP posts along the Yati. I was in Section 1 of Platoon 3; Section 3 of Platoon 3 which was about two kilometres away – they spotted a [group of] terrorists who hadn't actually seen them. They estimated that there

[12] There were ten SADF soldiers killed in this attack.
[13] Slang: Lieutenant.
[14] Literally: 'No Ambition, F---all Interest'!

were over a hundred terrorists, but with them being only a section, they did a fire and movement against these guys, with mortars coming from our area to support them, and still chased them away. Corporal Swanepoel knows that he shot someone; he stood up and shot someone before they did the fire and movement, and the guy actually fell, but his buddies dragged him away. We heard all of this over the radio; them calling for support weapons, and help. We could hear the mortars going off – it was right close to us. We ran to go and help them, but by the time we got there, the contact was over. The sweep afterwards recovered plenty of land mines and AK-47 magazines and lots of food, particularly Scandinavian tinned fish.

The Yati

A guy called Minnie from Port Elizabeth was shooting, and while he was shooting, the grass in front of him was starting to burn. He was putting it out, and while he was doing that a bullet must have ricocheted off something, and shot through his shirt, scraped the left hand side of his chest where his heart is, and got lodged between his water bottle and his fire bucket[15] on his webbing. He was a very lucky chap! He found the damaged round, and I'm sure he still has it today. That would have been the round that would have killed him if it had gone any deeper.

After Etale, I went on leave down to Port Elizabeth. It turned out to be about a month's pass. It was a nice one. Then we went back to Kimberley, got our kit, and a few days later we found ourselves at Okatope, which was also the old Okatope – both Etale and Okatope were destroyed and rebuilt into bigger, lusher bases. When I was in Etale the first time we were standing guard on the new Etale base while it was being built. We were guarding all

[15] Metal container that fits around the water bottle, and is used for drinking hot beverages.

the graders and tractors and that sort of thing. Okatope was quite a nice base. In Okatope we did a lot of patrols around the base. We also went up to Ondangwa and did some patrols up there, protecting the air base.

Section 3, Platoon 3 at Etale in 1979. Rifleman Minnie is standing hands on hips in the front row, next to Corporal Swanepoel on his left.

CONTACT

Not much action [happened] until Friday 13th April 1979 when we were on our last patrol. We weren't even a full platoon, there were only 14 of us. We debussed, the vehicles left, and we were supposed to start walking patrol straight away.

Section Leader Corporal Rix had said that he didn't want to go on this patrol, because he felt we was going to miss the *lang-bakke* (trucks) they were going to leave without him. He ended up actually going on the patrol, and then getting killed. It was something strange. For a few days before the patrol he was concerned; '*Ek wil nie gaan nie. Hulle sal sonder my ry.*' (`I don't want to go. They'll set off without me.')

The platoon sergeant was not interested in walking any further that day, so we bedded down where we were. We didn't do any protective movement. We stayed where we were. We found a big tree and we slept in a half moon around the tree. While we were there, about 45 terrorists actually crept in, and the nearest [PLAN] guy was about 20 feet away from me, and they were also in a half circle around us. Because we were close to a waterhole, there were cattle there, [so] we wouldn't have heard them anyway. They dug in about eight inches and made themselves a little wall, in front of them. The [PLAN] guys were armed with AK-47s and RPGs between themselves. Then, when they had set up, they *looi-ed* (hit) us.

I woke up, and I thought I was dreaming. There were green and red tracers flying over my head. I could feel sand actually hitting me from the bullets that were landing around me. The guy sleeping next to me on a groundsheet was hit in the leg and in the stomach. His name was Booysen. He was pretty badly injured, and he was screaming and sitting up. I was trying to keep him down. I was [also] trying to keep my head as low as possible as well, with my chin in the ground. These guys were *looi*-ing us big time – RPGs were hitting the tree above us and exploding. I shot off one shot with my R.1 and I had a *storing* (stoppage) because I had got sand in it while trying not to be hit. I managed to get hold of the weapon of the guy next to me, and I shot one shot off and that also had a *storing*. By this time, the fire had died down – it only lasted maybe 30 seconds or a minute – I don't know. Then these terrorists took off and ran.

Luckily for us the two guys standing guard had the heavy barrel R.1s, and they managed to open up fire straight away. I think that helped us a lot.

While the contact was going on, the guys [PLAN guerillas] were shouting *`Eie magte'* (`Own Forces') *`Eie magte'* The terrs were actually shouting fire and movement commands in Afrikaans. That's why we thought they were our own soldiers, in an attack against us. That's something very interesting. [*Very sophisticated - ed.*] It was either ex-South African soldiers who had turned, or somebody who had been near a training base and heard all the commands and used them. It was unnerving in a way, because you thought you were being attacked by your own guys. It would be interesting to know whether anyone had ever heard of the Terrs shouting commands in Afrikaans to mislead SADF people. Whether anyone else knows the same story.

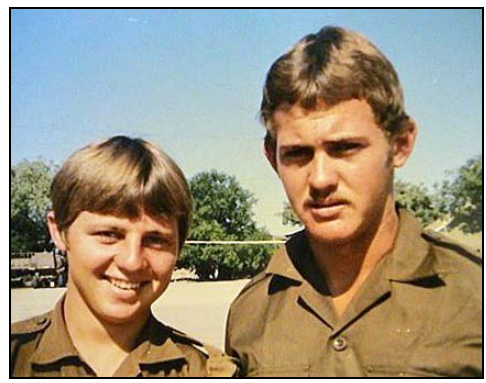
In the ambush Booysen, next to me, was shot. Corporal Beukes, the one-liner, he was shot in the foot. Corporal Rousseau was pretty badly shot – he wasn't really from our section at all. He was a corporal from the mortars platoon who just came out because he was bored in base. He came out on this last patrol with us. People I spoke to afterwards said that when they went to 1 Mil[16] in December of 1979, he was still there. He had bags hanging off of him, so he was pretty badly wounded. The platoon sergeant, his shirt was hanging up next to him on a little bush, and at the end of the fire fight it was full of holes. My sleeping bag was full of holes, and the ground sheet was full of holes. I was lucky that nothing ever happened to me.

I remember thinking to myself; '*Where is Corporal Rix? He was my corporal, but I don't hear him*.' Straight away we moved base, and set up somewhere else. People were saying; '*Corporal Rix, where are you*?' Nobody could find him. He was sleeping in between two guys, one was Geecox from Port Elizabeth – I can't remember who the other guy was. Corporal Rix was shot in between them. They found him under a bush – somehow he ended up under this bush. He could have stood up in the fire fight, not knowing where he was and got shot and fell in the bush. I don't know. They recovered him, and called for a casevac. We made it clear where a Puma could land, but this guy nearly landed on top of me. I had to run to get out of the way, because he couldn't really see where he was landing. This was at night, probably about half an hour after it had happened.

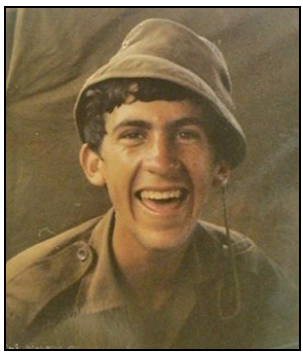
[16] No.1 Military Hospital in Voortrekkerhoogte, outside Pretoria.

Section 1, Platoon 3 – Dennis Finch is on the left in the front row, with Lance Corporal Gert Beukes in the middle and Corporal Rhian Rix on the right.

Lance Corporal Gert Beukes (left) and Corporal Rhian Rix (right). Corporal Rix was the Section Leader, 1 Section, 3 Platoon at Okatope. He was killed in action on the night of 13 April 1979, Lance Corporal Beukes was wounded in the foot in the same engagement.



After the contact, the next morning. The soldier is holding a captured AK-47, whilst a dead insurgent lies behind him.



Booysen (above) was wounded next to the author in the ambush.

An AK-47 and RPGs left behind by PLAN.

A rather damaged photograph of the old base at Okatope, with a helicopter either taking off or landing.

Corporal Rix was loaded up along with all the wounded, except for Corporal Beukes because he only had a heel wound. That was the last time that I saw any of those guys who were shot. They never ever returned to base. That was it.

We stayed around that area until the next morning. Nobody slept. I actually had a cigarette, although I don't smoke. The next morning a follow up group came, and they did a follow up on them [the terrorists]. When the sun came up, we were walking around, and we found AK-47 magazines and

spent *doppies* (cartridge cases) lying all around the place in their *stellings* (positions) so we could see where the guys had been lying. Also the RPG rounds.

About 30 metres away we found a dead body. It was one of the terrs who had been shot. He looked like he had just fallen asleep, although he was full of blood. As far as I can remember, they never ever caught these guys, even though they chased them with Buffels. They were long gone. I think they just went into the local population. Hid their weapons and just became the local population.

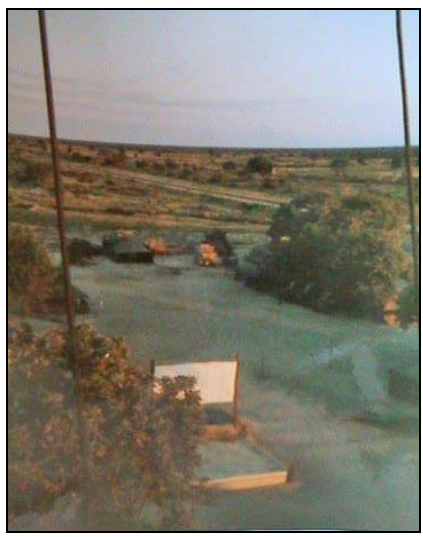
Besides the one terr who was killed, we don't know if anyone else was hit.

After that we went back to Okatope. We were in base, recovering and debriefing. They didn't really give us any afterthoughts; '*How do you guys feel about the situation*?' or anything. Some of the guys were actually trying to blame the platoon sergeant who didn't actually want to walk any further. He didn't actually want to go walking another 20 kilometres that day. That's possibly why we were caught in the ambush. That all died down.

Some of the suspects in the area, we even had to stand guard over, which wasn't a wise move, considering that one of our mates had just been killed.

[*Adjustment to having lost comrades*? – *ed.*] The guys were pretty sad about it, but I think we just got on with it afterwards. Nobody reacted in a negative way. They were pretty well trained.

Shortly after that we left back to `the States' because it was our last patrol. This was probably around the end of April that we went back to Kimberley, handed all our kit in, and went on pass for a few weeks.



Another view of the camp at Okatope, taken at sunset from on top of one of the towers there.

NKURUNKURU ISLAND

We came back [to South West Africa after that] and then we went to Rundu which was like a hotel compared to what we had been used to. We only spent a day or two there, and then the various platoons went off in various directions. We went to Nkurunkuru, which was a base near the river,

but we stood guard on a little island. Directly over the river was what must have been a holiday resort in the Portuguese days. It was really pretty, but the buildings had all been destroyed. We were an observation post on the Cubans – the Cubans were there. We used to give each other the 'F' signs, and we would swear at them. Nobody could speak Spanish, but we showed them our bare arses as well, and they understood.

We were young guys. We didn't really understand. Nobody ever really said; 'Cubans are your enemies.' We spent three months there. The very first night that I spent there – there was a little tent on this island. I just heard movement in the vegetation all night, and I crapped myself. I'd never really slept in the wilderness like that. It turned out that there were hippos all over the place, eating all the vegetation. That was the cause of the noise that I had heard. I didn't sleep at all that night. That was our first night there – we were actually standing guard there on this island.

It turned out to be quite a holiday. We swam a lot, and fished, and threw grenades in to water to get some fish out. During the day if you weren't standing guard, you'd go for long walks along the river. One particular time we were walking patrol and we came across these three guys who could easily have been shot because to us they looked like terrorists. They put their hands up, and they turned out to be UNITA soldiers. They were fully armed. They were officers of UNITA. One of them was quite sick, so we radioed Rundu and they came and fetched these guys, but they weren't too kind to them. They treated them pretty badly. In fact they tied them up and blindfolded them and chucked them in the back of the truck.

One particular night when we were sleeping in the bush, I woke up and heard what to me sounded like someone screaming, but it was actually an elephant close by. I don't know how close he was. I don't know if he smelt us, and wandered off. It was like my worst nightmare; waking up next to an elephant. We never saw him, but we could hear him. That was pretty scary.

On the whole, it wasn't a hot area as far as terrorists were concerned.

When we were in Nkurunkuru, a signal came through that Finch or Nix, something had happened to your family and you had to go to Rundu. We both went, and it turned out to be me. My stepfather had had a heart attack. We were in the base for a couple of days, and we knew the post office *tiffie*; the guys who sent us out our letters. He lent us a stripe each, and now all of a sudden we were lance corporals! One night I think we had about two Rand between the two of us, and we went into the NCO's bar, and we bought quite a few drinks. In those days a beer cost you 18 cents and a shot of cane and brandy cost you about 12 cents. We came out of there pretty sloshed on about two Rand. You couldn't do that today! So we got to see how the other half lived. Then we went back to base. I was denied [permission] to go back to Port Elizabeth even though my stepfather had had a heart attack. We went back to Nkurunkuru and we had wild parties there at night. We used to buy booze from the cuca shop, or our canteen guy used to buy us special bottles when he went up to Rundu when he went there to do his shopping for the canteen. We used to have quite good parties there. One day our Company Commanding Officer and the RSM came along to inspect the base, and the first thing they did was to go and look at the dump, and they saw there were liquor bottles everywhere. Our Lieutenant was in deep shit!

BACK TO 'THE STATES'

We finished up there, [and] went back to Rundu. From Rundu we went back to Grootfontein and flew back to 'the States' and went on leave, for another couple of weeks. We got back to Kimberley and they were looking for volunteers. I remembered; `Never volunteer for anything!' This time I also didn't volunteer. They said; '*We need guys to go back up to Etale. We will promote some guys to become corporals and section leaders*.' Some guys stepped forward and they became section leaders, and a few guys volunteered to go up. They got their quota of guys and there were still quite a lot of us left who hadn't volunteered. The guys who had got their kit, and they were off almost straight away. All of us who were left behind – they sent us off on pass for three weeks.

GROOTFONTEIN

When we got back off our pass, they said that they needed somebody up in Grootfontein, so we went up there as a reaction force, for the last three months of my army training, my army two years.

We stayed in houses near the airport, and we stayed there. We stood guard around Grootfontein Base as well. We used to guard at the main gate. That turned out to be very nice. There was no action. We didn't get danger pay. We weren't allowed to actually go into the town. If we needed any refreshments, it all came from the SAWI. It was quite good. Pretty boring though, but it was better than walking around up at Etale.

When we cleared out and we all went back to Kimberley, and we had a few days to clear out. I spoke to some of the guys who had gone up to Etale, and they reckoned it was a nightmare. They did lots of patrols. They said it wasn't very good. There was quite a lot of action as well, as far as contacts go. They should never have volunteered!

When we went up to Etale the first time, the first guy to die was Coetze[17] who was shot by his mate in the base because his mate hadn't done the proper procedures as far as unloading his weapon when you came into the base. He was shot in the head by his friend, and killed.

The second guy to die was a driver who hadn't fastened his seat belt, and he had offloaded the guys in the bush and he came back, and he was travelling on a high speed on the main road, and he hit an ox. He went flying out and the Buffel rolled over him.

After that it was Corporal Rix, and the guys who were injured.

At the end of the two years national service, another guy I knew – they were on patrol somewhere, and the guy kicked a can, and blew himself up. It had been booby-trapped. This is what I heard when we were *klaaring* out. I knew the guy. He was a driver as well. He went out on the last patrol of the year, and he was killed. I think there were one or two other guys who were killed. They had this little memorial at 11 Commando Base, and all the names were on there from that year. There were quite a few guys killed that I know about. Other people who I have spoken to since said that there were more guys killed than I knew [about].

[17] The editors were unable to trace this man's details from existing SADF Rolls of Honour.

Contacts weren't every day, but at least every few days, you would hear that other platoons or other companies [were] having contacts along the Yati. Each platoon would have their area to patrol, and you would hear guys pretty close to you having contacts. You would hear bullets flying high. One particular time we were laying under a tree, and we heard this contact pretty close – mortars and everything. It was really close to us. It was our guys but from a different platoon having a contact.

[*Any thoughts that the war would carry on for another 10 years*? – *ed*.] I don't think we even contemplated it. What we were there to do was our national service, and then go home, and look forward to our camps – or not look forward to our camps or whatever way you want to look at it. It was a pretty new war. I remember having to go to the dentist from Etale, and I remember having to travel on a Unimog on a dirt road, with sandbags on the floor of the Unimog, and that was our anti-mine vehicle. I remember the Bedford `Hippo' being quite active then. We did have the Buffels, but there weren't that many of them, and they were only really used when they were dropping you off in the bush, when you had to go on *`Oom Willie se pad'* and those places. It was still a young war.

The author standing in front of a vehicle blown up by a landmine. The crater can be seen in the left foreground.

KLAARING **OUT**

We had a *klaaring* out parade, but it's not fresh in my mind. We had so many parades. I can't remember what type of parade we had. We had parades after basics. We had parades in the show grounds, at Kimberley Showgrounds. We had memorial parades for fallen soldiers, and things like that.

I only received my Pro Patria medal through the post about three months later.

CAMPS

I was expecting to have about two years off without camps, so I think it was in about 1982 or the beginning of 1983 that I went up to Ondangwa with the Kaffarian Rifles from East London. My unit was actually Regiment Piet Retief from Port Elizabeth, but the Kaffarian Rifles didn't have enough guys so we were called to go with them to Ondangwa. That's where we stood guard and walked patrol. We were joined by the SA Cape Corps.

The Kaffarian Rifles – they tried to keep you busy as much as possible. You actually had very little sleep with them. You were either standing guard, digging trenches, or cleaning trenches, or walking patrols, or going to fetch rats - from Oshakati. Day patrol, night patrol - you were always doing something. We did some three week patrols, but when we had a week or two back in base, [and] they would keep you busy.

And later they called me up again. It was with Regiment Piet Retief. We went to Napara, West of Rundu. It had its own air base as well. It was a very sandy and dusty place. We were there about a month, mostly walking patrol. Our platoon was picked to go to Bogani Bridge to go and stand guard there, and we spent two months there, standing guard. It turned out to be like a holiday going there. It's across the Okavango River, north of Botswana, close to the Chorbe River. I believe that there was a 32 Battalion base quite close. They often crossed over where we were. We didn't really have contact with them – speaking to them or anything. Every time they came over they used to sing the song `Buffalo Soldiers' – the Bob Marley one.

We managed to get hold of some fishing lines, and we caught some tiger fish, and we spent a good two months there. Then we went off back to `the States' and carried on with our life.

I did a one-month camp at a base near Middleburg, at an ammunition dump there. I can't remember the name of the area now. We spent a month standing guard around the ammunition dump, and that was it. That was the last camp I did.

PERMANENT FORCE 1987

And then I joined the Permanent Force. I managed to get a transfer from Port Elizabeth, Regiment Piet Retief up to Durban Command – I was living and working in Durban at the time. Taking the train from Durban to Port Elizabeth every time I was called up for a camp was a pain in the backside. They hadn't called me up for two or three years anyway.

I joined the permanent force as a chef at Natal Command, and I spent five years with them, learning the art of cooking, which has lead me to doing what I do now. I was a butcher at the time, so I saw it as one step up. It was something that I enjoyed doing. I was 27 years old at that stage, and I needed somebody to teach me cooking. I was too old for hotel schools. The army taught me a little bit. They didn't teach me that much. They taught me a lot about mass catering, which helped me when I left the permanent force to get into big catering companies to do other things. Now I have my own company

catering for hundreds of people, and sometimes thousands of people in fact, and [this] helped me to get a work permit to work in Canada, and now I am a permanent resident. The army has helped me in ways that I would never have expected.

I left the permanent force because I got bored. I got tired of the same thing that I was doing every day, and I needed more stimulation. I left in August 1991, and I became a catering manager for Weston Agricultural College in Mooi River, and I spent two years there, and then I was transferred up to Vryheid, to be the catering manager for a big school there, and about a year after that I became the area manager for Hospitality Caterers, which had a lot of government contracts for KwaZulu Natal, police force and schools. I was looking after that until April 1995 when I moved to England. I worked as a chef for a few years, until I got my catering business started.

The author as a Sergeant chef in the Permanent Force.

LOOKING BACK

My army experience is something that has always stuck with me, and whenever South Africans who were in the military get together, we all seem to start talking about it, as the most exciting time of our lives. It was pretty exciting in a way, although at the time you didn't think it was exciting – it was a bitter-sweet experience, but it is something that I would have done again.

Chapter Eight

Jakes
3 SA Infantry, Potchefstroom 1981 - 1982
52 Battalion, Mahenene Base

Jakes reported for National Service at 3 SAI Potchefstroom in January 1981. He did Junior Leaders: Section Leaders course. After that he spent significant time with 52 Battalion, Sector 10, including at Mahenene Base, and walked foot patrols into Angola. He did border camps with the First City Regiment (Grahamstown) in 1984 and Townships in 1986, and later camps within South Africa.

Like most boys born in SA between 1957 and 1972, I received my Force number when I was 16, in standard 8 (form 3).

I had been brought up with lots of exposure to WW2 veterans: my father, my uncle, and all their friends had fought or served in WW2, and I remember stories of Tobruk and North Africa. I had stood at countless veterans parades at diverse MOTH halls and memorials. So basically, military honour and military service had been subconsciously drilled into me from an early age, with "war stories" of WW2, a war that was fought to rid the world of very real and obvious criminals and tyrants, like Hitler.

The South African government of that time in my youth had a very real reason to fear *"Die Rooi Gevaar",* or as it has been labeled, "The Total Onslaught". Mozambique had fallen to a Communist regime in 1975, as had Angola, despite our best efforts to intervene. By the time I received my force number, Rhodesia was under extreme pressure. If South West Africa fell, it left poor Botswana as the sole democratic front-line state. (I won't count Swaziland or Lesotho as "states").

When I got my force number, I went into "gung-ho mode": A son of a friend of my dad had served in the Parabats, and I got an old set of browns from him, as well as an old Parabat "bunny jacket" (they called them bum-freezers). I resuscitated my Dad's air-force boots, and I would to pitch up at school cadet drill parades in this gear.....I got some very funny looks, but then again, I never was normal, and always pretty much marched to the beat of my own drum, even today.

In any case, I spent standards 8, 9, and 10 running 2,4 km, as well as doing the Trim park circuit at Tuks sports grounds. I ran every day, and also played rugby and hockey during winter. I remember looking back after my first year of National Service, and realizing that I was a fool to think I was either fit or prepared enough for military training in an Infantry Battalion.

Due to a little "tiff" with my step-mother, I ran away from home after my last Matric exam, and moved into a room at my girl-friend's house out in the smallholdings near Bronkhorstspruit. Her dad got me a job at Grinaker Electronics in Waltloo, and I spent a month working at the Fighting Vehicles

Department, fitting out communications shelters (22 foot containers filled with the latest radio equipment) for SADF Signals regiments. I'm not too much of an electronics buff, but even I was impressed that these things had one KiloWatt radio amplifiers. And I chased my hormones. By the time I reported for National Service at Pretoria Station on 12 January 1981, all my training had been lost.

"Inklaar Dag": I remember being dropped at the station by my girl-friend and her parents, with just a suit-case, and with hundreds of conscripts walking around with stunned, shocked faces: This couldn't be happening!

At the main door of Pretoria station, army personnel were checking for call-up instructions, and comparing names to lists. We got sent to different parts of the platform, depending on our destination and musterings, but from what I could see that day, we were mostly all going to Potch.

As we all got shoved into train carriages, I remember that I had never before felt so alone and unable to control my destiny. It was a feeling that would never completely leave me for the whole duration of my two years. That feeling, that loss of control of my own life, was one of the major reasons why I never joined Permanent Force, even when they made it very tempting to sign a short-term contract.

The train started its journey, and slowly we started making friends and acquaintance with those around us. Funnily enough, two of the guys I met on that train stayed my friends through the whole two years, and through some of my roughest times. I still miss those guys:

Zane van der N was a pretty weird guy from Halfway House (now Midrand). Medium height, with long sun-bleached blond hair, he had been a competing body-builder during high-school, and a track athlete of some skill. Glen F was a short, stocky guy from Moloto north of Pretoria, and a real extrovert. He had been head-boy or something at CBC (Christian Brothers College), and 1st team rugby captain. Probably flyhalf.

Finally, after stopping at just about every little hick station between Pretoria and Potch, we arrived at a station inside Potch University (Potchefstroom Universiteit vir Christelike Hoe Onderwys - Pukke). I think the station was called Kaserne. It felt like days, but we'd only been on the train about four hours.

As soon as we got off the train, there was pandemonium! Corporals were screaming at everybody in Afrikaans, and conscripts were running around like flies around a dog-turd. Eventually, everybody was lined up in 3's, and for the first time in national service, we were told to count off from the right. This didn't take as long as one might think, as our Cadet training kicked in.

We were told to pick up our "civvy shit", to left-face, and to forward march. It was more of a fast walk actually, but that didn't stop the continual abuse and running commentary from the instructors.

After marching for about two kilometres through a deserted university campus, we swung through a gate into our "home": 3 SA Infantry base. To my unpracticed eye, everything looked square, straight, or at right-angles. In retrospect, that wasn't far wrong: everything in Infantry bases IS square, straight, or at right angles; that's what makes RSMs happy…

Our first stop was the mess, where we were graciously allowed to eat two slices of dry bread between which a square of rancid butter had been slapped,

and a styrofoam cup of weak cold drink. Jam was optional, if you could wrestle it away from the flies and bees. Welcome to the army! At that point, I truly started regretting not going to Varsity first. Not that my father had really provided the option.

Many guys started pulling "civvy food" out of their suitcases. I thought about it, and then realized that I wasn't starving yet, and might have a bigger need for my biltong and stuff later. It proved to be a wise decision.

In no time at all, we were back in ranks of three, and off for registration, medical, and haircuts. By the end of the day, I knew my force number off by heart. Afrikaans wasn't a problem for me, being bilingual, but some English guys really suffered.

Even though I had bad eyesight and flattish feet, there I went: G1K1, medically fit for combat training. I also saw one guy with only one arm. He also stayed. The medical exam was a farce: if you could get there on your own power, you were OK. I doubt if the medical orderlies even knew what a hernia was: I think they just enjoyed feeling the other guys' balls. I think they realized the training would weed the useless ones out soon enough.

The haircuts were the only highlight of the whole day: we went into hysterics at the sight of some of the people: I didn't even recognize Zane after his hair-cut. The barbers were from town, and they had a ball. There was only one length: Number 1. That's an electric clipper with the finest-tooth comb available, a "# 1". Our hair was so short, we couldn't even grip it with our finger-tips. We were to bless the hair-styles later, when maintaining hygiene in the bush became difficult. But most high school boys are proud of their hair, and set great stock on their hair as being an extension of their personalities, so being sheep-sheared like that was a real leveler.

From there, we were off to the QM stores, still carting our suitcases, bags, and hold-alls like a bunch of teen-age refugees in a world gone Orwellian.

At the QM, we had to queue in alphabetical order, and then go through the process of measurement, issue, and signing. Walking out the other side, we had: a steel trunk (*trommel*), filled with blanket, sheets, pillow, pillow-case, and eating tray (*varkpan*); a kit-bag (*balsak*) filled with 3 x overalls, 3 pairs browns, 2 pairs boots, webbing, rucksack, water-bottle, vests, 3 x underpants, 3 x socks, scarf, balaclava, cammo-net, helmet, and a dozen other items. One person couldn't possibly carry his own stuff, so we moved off to our designated area on the other side of the parade ground in pairs, coming back for everything in trips.

At some point, a staff sergeant walked past, and tore a strip off a corporal because we were in civvy clothes (*"Wat maak hierdie fokking civvies op my paradegrond, Korporaal?"*). We were ordered to strip immediately, and put on overalls, army socks and boots. There we were, several hundred guys stripping down in the middle of a parade ground. Truly bizarre. Overalls were to be our preferred dress for the whole of basics.

After sitting around for hours, suddenly a line of old Bedfords roared down the road, and pulled up next to each other in a line on the other side of the parade ground. Suddenly, after waiting all afternoon, with the sun almost gone, we were led to believe that it was imperative that we only have 30 seconds to move our kit 100 metres. Once again, pandemonium, as we tried to move a mountain of kit instantaneously.

By then, some of the guys had started muttering about this little snot-nosed Corporal. Unfortunately, he heard us, and we did our first little jog for PW Botha – up and down the road, touch the boundary wire, come back (*"Gaan raak die draad, rowers"*). This continued for a while, and some of the unfortunates were still paired up on *trommels*, and had to run with these beastly objects. Finally we were "embussed" (*klim in die Bedfords, rowers*). The kit was bundled onto trailers.

Then we waited for ages until the last poor bastards got their kit and climbed onto a Bedford. By now, it was dark, we were cramped in like sardines, and everybody was very quiet, probably thinking about home, like I was.

Suddenly, the engines started, and off we went through the base, out the gate, into a suburb that glowed with street lights. I suddenly felt totally alienated from that civilian world. It was amazing how quickly the SADF had detached us from the real world.

Then we swung off the tar, onto a dirt road, and we were subjected to 30 minutes of choking dust and bumps. After what seems much longer, we swung off the road, bumped down a dirt track past some dark trees, and stopped. The corporals had disappeared. I think they stayed behind in town, the sods. All the driver did was open the tailgate and tell us we must have our kit off in an hour.

It was dark. When I mean dark, it was almost pitch black, with only starlight for illumination. Zane, Glen, and myself realized we had a torch between the 3 of us, and we started getting our stuff off the trailer. We'd had the presence of mind earlier to mark our kit with masking tape we found at the QM, otherwise we'd never have come right.

Over near the trees were lines and lines of 5m x 5m army tents, so we found an empty one, and moved in. There were six beds with mattresses per tent, and eventually three other guys moved in: I don't remember their names any more. We finally settled down after midnight, and fell asleep.

So now we found ourselves in tents in good old Bloekombos, about 10 kilometres outside of Potch on the Klerksdorp road. Over the next couple of days, more and more guys arrived. If I remember correctly, eventually there were over 900 troops housed in a huge square of 150 tents. We were to be temporarily called Foxtrot Company, if I remember correctly. This was the company that would be used to select likely candidates for, among other musterings, Infantry School. Those that were selected would be sent to the Infantry School at Oudtshoorn.

From day one, we were subjected to the standard *"rower"* (scab: name for a raw recruit) indoctrination: we ran everywhere, we always had our helmet-liners on ("doibies"), except when we, ate, slept, or prayed.

I started learning Afrikaans curses and swear-words I never could have imagined. We were woken up three or four times every night to call the roll. Can you imagine how long it takes to read 900+ names? We used to run the obligatory laps - *"Om die bome, om die tente, om die kakhuis. Daar gaat julle, rowers!"* (Round the trees, round the tents, round the shithouse). Think about it: 900 guys running circuits, with the dust thick in your lungs. The "trees" were a copse of bluegum trees about 400m x 100m, the shithouse was a pair of 4m x 8m tents erected over a line of long-drops about 400m to the north,

and the huge square of 150 tents made up the eastern part of the triangle, and must have measured about 100m x 75m. You can just imagine. I started to realize at this point that Infantry training at Potch was going to be no picnic.

Basic Training had started. During about two weeks of seemingly aimless PT (it was to weed the useless from the pack), we started endless lessons regarding drill, military protocol and practice.

After four or more weeks, we were issued our new R4's, straight out of the vacuum-packs. These were the post-wooden R4's, with tubular riveted stocks, and small fore-sights. It took us weeks to get them clean, and every time they were in the sun, more grease baked out around studs and rivets and collected dust.

Our tents had sand floors, and each bed had a steel *"kas"* (cabinet) next to it: you know the one, two sliding doors with shelves on one side and hanging space on the other. At some point, it started to rain, and for a week-and-a-half, our tents were eight inches under water. Since our trommels couldn't stay under our beds anymore, we slept with them on the foot of our beds. Nevertheless, everything in the trommel got wet, and our stuff started to rot.

I cursed my civvy suitcase, as well as all the crap that I'd brought with because the National Service Induction Guide said we should: floor polish, iron, scrubbing brushes, steel-wool, and so on. What use in a tent? I finally sold the whole thing, with my civvies, to an *Ou Man* driver for R10.

After 10 weeks of basics, they started separating us into musterings, so that we could complete basics with our new units, where applicable. I was picked for Officers Training Course at Oudtshoorn, but I declined the mustering. If I look back after all these years, I reckon I was just chicken that I'd fail, and have to RTU. I suppose I have a lot of fear, as you will read later (if you don't fall asleep first). One of the officers, a Lt. Andy Birrell, tried to change my mind, but I was adamant: I wanted to stick with my mates. He told me I was making a mistake….

We were offered other units: Sappers, Bikes, Medics, Parabats, and so on.

Instead, cunts that we were, we volunteered for Section Leaders. The end-of-basics parade was held, and so while most of this massive company split up and moved away, we spent two weeks taking down tents, and replacing our kit at the QM. We left around 25 tents standing, and found that odd.

Hell, we thought, this SL course is going to be tame, and then we get rank in any case. Shit, were we wrong.

We were shipped back to base and pushed into some tents just outside the main company lines.

For a while, we got away with attending parades, and we thought we'd been forgotten. Not so: we were found, and sent to populate a set of bungalows in what would become Bravo company lines. But at that stage, that company was still in tents, and I can only assume that the lines used to belong to Charlie or Delta Company, who were on the border. Again, we thought SL's was going to be OK: bungalows, hey! Wrong again. We were there long enough to learn to hate bungalows: they needed extra cleaning, and there was suddenly no excuse for dust in the barrel of the R4!

If I remember correctly, Section Leaders was 16 weeks, from the beginning of April until the end of July. We would deploy to our new companies then, ready to lead our sections, we hoped.

Glen F, Zane vd N and I were still together. The Three Stooges/Musketeers?

There were about 200 guys on Section Leaders to start off, but we were told right at the start that selection would weed out 50%. We were now officially part of Alpha Company, for the time being.

Never, during the entire SL course, did we get any preferential treatment. In fact, I reckon our instructors went out of their way to grind us in front of the other troops. Almost to say: "See, these guys are better".

After a month in bungalows, it was time for "*verlof*" (leave). In that month, while the other normal companies were easing into the Second Phase of Basics (non-combat troops only ever get to see the First Phase of 12 weeks: Second Phase lasts another eight!) we had already started learning about squad weapons, and were also deep into Conventional Warfare lectures, which were usually held either up next to the Bravo Coy mess, at the mini *veldkuns* area next to the base, or some kilos out towards Dirkie Uys *skietbaan*.

We were to leave on pass early Friday morning: or so we thought: four glorious days in civvy street. The normal rigmarole applied for this pass: *opfok, rondfok, opfok, rondfok*. We started off with an inspection at 06h00 in Browns, the inspection, needless to say, was a disaster: fault was found with everything. Our bungalow was dirty, we were also, somebody hadn't shaved perfectly, etc, etc. After two hours of PT up and down Bravo Coy lines (*"Sien jy die draad daar onder? Raak die draad!"*), we had five minutes to shower and change into Step-outs. More *opfok*. Back into Browns….*opfok*…..step-outs. Push-ups in step-outs? You daren't touch the ground with anything else but your hands and toes, chum, or else you're dirty. And then you can't go on pass, can you? Fire-man's lift, sheep-lift, baby-carry, and on, and on, and on. Eventually at around 10h30, somebody's parents at the gate complained. The instructors relented, but promised to continue the fun when we got back……we had no doubts about that anyway.

And so, off we went, for our first pass.

Zane's dad gave me a lift to an off-ramp on the Ben Schoeman, near Kyalami, and it was easy enough to get a lift through to Meyerspark: roughly three hours from Potch main gate to home. Some poor bastards from Port Elizabeth and East London spent 24 hours on buses and in cars.

The four days passed very quickly: I touched base with some friends, slept late, and even fetched my 100cc scrambler from my so-recently ex-girlfriend (I had received the Dear Johnny letter during basics). The bike had no electricals, and I rode it home in the dark along the old Bronkies road…..the things I did and got away with…

Monday came too quickly, but I got to Zane's place in time, and the trip back to Potch was spent in silence. As we got closer to Potch, the familiar sinking feeling started coming back. It was a feeling I would associate with military bases for many years.

We were no sooner in our bungalows that afternoon, than we were told to get into browns: *"Ons gaan nou daai civvy kak uit jou uit kry, fokkers!"*

Since we had been doing squad weapons, and our R4s were still in the weapon store, it was natural that we were given Brens for the opfok. Thank God I had remembered the drills: switching mags, IA drills, stoppages, barrels

swops, gunner 1 & 2 rotation. After about 30 minutes, I was allowed to sit it out for a while, as the other poor idiots who hadn't paid attention did Bren-gun PT. That thing is normally heavy anyway, but when in the high port position…..

And all the time, the subtle questioning regarding dropping out: "*you can stop any time; just tell us, you can be back with your company immediately*." I can't remember how many did, but quite a few fell away at every stage. As I said, I think we started off with about 200 hopefuls. By the time we were finished SLs, they had to quickly find extra section 2ICs, as we were short….that means more than 100 dropped out in some way or other.

I remember at one stage while we were in bungalows, we ran back from the shooting range with poles, and around the airfield as well, but that was all part of the "fun"…

Suddenly, after two weeks or so in base, we were told to pack up. Within a day, we were back at Bloekombos, in the tents we had left standing. To me, it felt like being home…….

Now that we were away from the constraints and confines of base routine, training started in earnest. We realized that our time in base had just been to accommodate the leave cycle, and to weed out any weaklings.

The routine became the following, as far as I remember:

04h30 Reveille
05h00 Coffee
05h00-06h30 PT/*opfok/om-die-bloekombos*
06h30-07h00 Prepare for inspection
07h00 Inspection, prep for lectures
07h30-09h30 Lectures, battle-drills, etc
09h30-10h30 Brunch
10h30-13h30 Lectures etc
13h30 Tea
13h30-16h30 Lectures
16h30-until dark: Battle PT

Sometimes the Battle PT started after Tea and went on all afternoon. Battle PT is, in effect, PT with normal combat gear: helmet, webbing and rifle. By then, the webbing had been fleshed out to 3 x R4 ammo pouches and 3 water-bottles. All bottles had to be full at the start of PT, and all pouches should have gravel inside. Extra magazines were left in the tents. The kidney pouches had to have the dixies inside, and we had to have gravel in the dixies.

With between five and eight hours of lectures per day, we were also being exposed to a huge amount of military information every day.

The daily program concluded as follows:

18h00 Supper
19h00-21h00 Own time, washing, etc.
21h00-22h00 Study time (and they checked!)
22h00 Bible time (and they checked!)
22h30 Lights out

This routine was basically followed for six days out of the seven. On Sundays, we didn't get lectures, we just got more *opfok*. Several times the

Dominee was sent away because we were too busy with Battle PT somewhere in the Bloekombos valley.

A favourite habit of Cpl Sparks Reyneke was to sneak between the tent-lines and peek into tents. If you didn't have a book or bible in your face during the appropriate time, it meant the WHOLE tent did extra PT the next day, and you got a "marble": a 20kg cube of cement, about 30cm x 30cm x30cm. A bitch of a thing to carry, but at least it wasn't round or smooth. I avoided that thing like the plague. Consequently, I ended up being very up to date with my studying! Zane and I used to score in the top 10% on every test, and it became a mini competition between us.

Formal exams were written every couple of weeks, but from the start there was some serious corruption. Some of the "good old boys" that were into the instructor's bum-holes were given the answers during the exams. This pissed Zane and me off no-end, but there was nothing we could do. The practice continued until graduation, and I guess about 10% of the SL graduates actually failed their theory, and indeed, most of their practical exams too. I now realize that the leader group had a serious tight-rope to walk: how to maintain some standards while keeping the English/Afrikaans demographics from getting out of hand. Probably the same issue they have today….

I can't remember too much of the time on SLs, except to say that we were always tired and hungry. All the push-ups, sit-ups and buddy PT just blends into one memory. Of course, we did all the training at an accelerated pace, as we had to be ahead of the sections we were to lead later. So we effectively finished our infantry training in half the time.

There was one very funny incident: we kept on being sent up the hill behind Bloekombos to fetch leaves or to go see what was on the other side. At one stage, Reyneke asked one trainee what he had seen. He replied: *"Ek het pantserkarre en tente gesien* (I saw armoured cars and tents)". Reyneke was incensed by this blatant lying, so we all had to go and see. And true enough, a squadron of Eland 90s was parked over the hill…..

I do remember that the theoretical content of the lectures was quite advanced: we did command and control lectures up to a battalion commander level, which was probably too high for most of the target audience. Perhaps the reason for the "assistance"?

The practical drills were up to a Platoon Commander level, and we all had turns commanding a platoon during live-fire exercises.

We did so many live-fire exercises, some guys actually had to have their R4s replaced. I think there was an issue with the ammo and the number of turns of rifling in the barrel, I'm not sure. Could just have been poor maintenance.

I also had to have my R4 replaced, but for the following reason:

We were practicing second-phase platoon live-fire attacks, with an LMG off on the left flank providing covering fire. Zane and I got our turn to be LMG group, so when the attack started, the drill was that the platoon returned fire, and we sprinted up the side of the saddle of the hill to the Bren emplacement. When we got there the first time, the instructors had decided that the acting Platoon Commander had duffed something, so we got sent back down. Half-way down, I tripped, and to save myself, I ditched my R4. I ended up breaking the cocking lever and front sight off the weapon. The

weapon tiffy was not impressed, but I was one of the first to get a second-generation R4, with the new folding butt and larger front sight. And all the fire-and-movement cooked the grease out soon enough.

Two other incidents are still fresh in my mind: the syndicate *vasbyt*, and the final forced march.

The syndicate *vasbyt* was supposedly modelled on the Oudtshoorn *vasbyt*: except that it was shorter (twenty-four hours) and there were no mountains, just plenty of hills. We were divided into syndicates, or teams, of 20 or so. The idea was that we had to get to a series of check-points as a group, find the map co-ordinates for the next checkpoint that were hidden in the area, and move on, finishing with finding a final message, all within twenty-four hours. Something like wide-area orienteering, which I had done *ad naseum* in Boy Scouts. For me, this was bread and butter stuff. I could find north without a compass, and a map was like an open book to me. I'd been navigating with topo maps and a compass since I was 12. Some of the jokers couldn't work out back-bearings or True North.

The other problem here was that we were carrying full Marching Order: full kit, with clothing, sleeping bags, bivvies, ground-sheet. The whole shebang, barring the kitchen sink. Roughly 30kgs of dead weight. We started off well enough, but by 22h00 we realized two things: we had missed the crucial message at the last check-point on some hill, and now the syndicate was fighting. Some guys, including Zane, had decided to sleep until first light, and then to enter base and declare we had all gotten lost.

Now, with us on the SL course were guys I think were called "Ops Clerks": guys that would end up being seconded to battle group HQs, and who had to have a high level of combat skills to fit into a place like that. Myself and one of these guys decided that we were not going to give up and lose the syndicate competition, and we were going to leave our kit and back-track about seven kilometres and try and find a hidden beer-bottle with a message inside. On a hill. In the dark. Without a torch. And we did…….we got back to the syndicate after 01h00, where they were still sulking in the TB. Most of them were asleep. We two were about dead on our feet, we were scratched and torn, and we'd fallen over or into countless rocks, logs and holes.

But we did it. And we were the second syndicate home. This proved to be a turning point in my development as a SL, indeed as a person.

You have to understand that when I got to 3 SAI, I was introverted, self-conscious and undeniably without self-confidence or leadership reserves, despite the fact that I had been a Scout patrol leader for many years. After just five months, I was realizing that I could influence people. To me, that was a paradigm shift. I still had a long way to go, but suddenly I could see a road ahead.

I'm sorry I never saw that Ops Clerk again after SLs, he was REAL, man. All I remember is that he was some Soutie from Jo'burg.

The second incident and also the final selection hurdle was the forced march. Once again, full marching order. This time, we were dropped off just outside Potch in groups, and had to make the 10 kilometres back to Bloekombos in 60 minutes. Now, let me put this into perspective: a really fast walk is around six km/h. A 2.4 kilometre with webbing and R4 is run at about 20 km/h. We had to do 10 kilometre in an hour with full kit. A straight road,

so no short-cuts. I made it with three minutes to spare. Many fell out of SLs on this final test.

Once again, this taught me something: that if you have the commitment and desire to complete something, you can and will. At that stage I was damned if I was going to fail, I'd put in too much effort.

Finally, the Section Leader course was over. I was fitter than I'd ever been, before or since. Suddenly, I was finishing runs in the top 10, not the last 10.

The results were handed out:

Jakes: Section Leader
Glen: Section Leader
Zane: Section 2IC

Zane was gutted. A natural athlete with an above average IQ, I think his only failing was that he moaned under pressure. I tended to shut up and sulk (Zane even called me the Incredible Sulk), and Glen just stayed Glen (naughty bugger). But Zane complained. He was too much of a micro-manager, I suppose, and hated inefficiency. He's a very good Project Manager now, I hear, and that makes sense!

Why do I mention Zane specifically? Well, that I will soon reveal….

We had our End Of Course party at Bloekombos, and all I remember was Glen F, drunk as a skunk on four beers, running straight through the tent from one side to the other, making Buffel engine noises…..and Sgt Scrivener, newly-promoted Sgt Reyneke, and another Sgt from the LWT passing out around their fire…..I don't know if this was the time Reyneke was saved from burning to death in the fire because he passed out, but it might just have been…

With SLs over, we were posted to our "new" companies. Glen, Zane and I wangled the queue (we were learning…) so that we all got assigned to Bravo Coy.

Glen got his own section in Platoon 3, and Zane and I were sent to Platoon 1, under Cpl Steyn (more about this character later). Hmmmm…..guess who became my 2IC in Section 1? Yep, Zane.

Over the next six months, the only reason I coped with all the new problems associated with being an SL, was Zane. It's not that he provided support: in fact, he was often more critical of my dubious leadership than the rest of the section: no, it just helped that I had an ally. And his criticism was often a God-send, catching me from doing something stupid. Here's to you Zane, may the road rise up to meet you, comrade.

The start of my new deployment was rough. Very rough. We hadn't been given stripes, not even one. I suppose the leader group wanted to see if there were more dropouts. Very wise, because the first two months was a VERY stressful bonding period. And some leader-group elements didn't help us at all…..Steyn, for instance. He would make sure he never missed an opportunity to drive a wedge between the new SLs and the troops. What was his problem? I found out later…….

We were in base in Bravo Coy's new bungalows (coincidentally the same row as when we were there at the start of SLs) for four weeks, finishing off conventional training with our new companions. Enough to rediscover my

dislike for a structured base routine and fixed inspections…..I remember Steyn giving us pole PT around and around the line of bungalows next to the Artillery School fence….

While we were in base, the new SLs and section 2ICs in our platoon had a huge fight with the troops. This cleared the air, but all I remember is Zane vd N standing on his bed and waiting for people to attack him, then either snap-kicking them into the corner, or else performing some really cool judo stuff on them. I just did my best not to get smacked: I wasn't a big fighter back then.

In this period, we spent a week in trenches, finishing off Conventional Training with the battalion. It was so cold, one-litre water-bottles froze solid over-night. I won't discuss digging trenches into the bed-rock of the Potch hills, which are part of the larger Witwatersrand Bowl complex, but you can imagine…

We finally got our first stripes: the SLs were marched off to the QM and were each given a nice new shiny pair of nutria stripes (kameelbyte). I still remember my heart swelling in my chest when I pulled those horrible silk-screened things over my rolled-up shirt-sleeves.

Then back to Bloekombos for COIN and final prep for the Operational Area. This translated into section and platoon Battle Drills, COIN movement drills, vehicle drills, and endless sessions of fire-and-movement. At one stage, the tendons and ligaments in my knees became so inflamed, I couldn't bend my legs. And if I bent them, I couldn't straighten them….

It was during this period at Bloekombos, where we slept in bivvies, that it snowed in Jo'burg (Sept 1981). A slushy type of frozen sleet fell in Potch, and I have NEVER been so cold. But the training went on….

One funny incident occurred when we were doing vehicle IA drills: instead of dropping the sides of the Buffel when debussing for an attack, we had to jump over the top. Now that is easily an eight-foot drop. After the umpteenth attack, I misjudged my landing, and somehow my chin connected with my knee, and I knocked myself lights-out. Everybody thought it was funny. I didn't, it was bloody painful. I was lucky: I saw some guys perform face-plants and various other stunts.

At the end of September, there was a pre-selection for Junior Recces. Some of us did this pre-selection (3.2 kilometre run, push-ups, buddy PT, etc), and quite a few of us passed this, but I didn't go do the course. I suppose the thought of another three months of pain at the Bluff in Durban and DukuDuku sort of put me off, just for the dubious pleasure of wearing a little badge above one pocket….(A Junior Recce, as far as I remember, was NOT entitled to be called an operator: he simply got a badge of a Compass Rose on a red background that he could wear over one browns shirt pocket, like a tracker badge (Ratel). If I remember correctly, the idea was to add skills to the standard infantry, but I think the idea didn't catch on, and fell away after a couple of years.)

And unless you have also experienced extended periods of physical training, you won't understand that being pushed at that level all the time is extremely painful, both physically and mentally. By then, we had been exposed to 10 months of physical and mental abuse, including our time on SLs which was much worse than for the normal trainee. I take my hat off to the guys that become Recces, if just for the fact that they finish their selection,

let alone for their technical skills. We had had three or four guys that RTU'd from 1 Para Bn, and all of them said that Parabat training was no worse than 3 SAI: the only difference was the jump training, and that's where all 3 had fallen out due to various reasons like injury, fear of heights, and so on. One of these guys was another volunteer: Virginio Ponte, an Italian, whose father owned the Ponte Building in Jo'burg.

Hugely nice guy, big and as strong as an ox. A blonde Italian!

So instead of Junior Recces, we SLs were issued our second stripe, the 2ICs got their "kameelbyte", and on 1 October, 1981, we stepped into the C-130s for our flight to Grootfontein…

Four hours later, we stepped out of the plane into a 40-degree oven. What a shock from the late winter in SA. On to *"wit olifante"*: 20-ton Mercedes drop-side trucks, and off we went. The next stop was Oshigambo, 53BN, Sector 10. This was a small permanent company base about 35 kilometres NNE of Oshikati on the *Wit Pad* to Eenhana. The primary strategic reasons were: area dominance of that section of mid Ovamboland, mine-sweeping of the *Wit Pad*, and protection of the water-towers (Echo and Delta, if I remember correctly).

What a dump! When we got there, some CF unit was there, and they had done zero base-maintenance. There were no elevated water tanks, and therefore all water came from rubber bladder-tanks that were refilled on an infrequent basis from dubious sources. The base was filthy, and the kitchen a cesspool.

Within two days, we went out on patrol to allow the CF unit to sign everything back and leave for SA.

The patrol started off badly. At that stage, our PelBev[18] was a huge Afrikaner teacher from Potch (Badenhorst?), who played rugby for Western Transvaal. And the PelSers[19] was Steyn, with his new bush rank of Sgt making his arms look like they were on localized steroids (*"pampoen armpies"*). We got lost. We ran out of water. We had tins of beans and beetroot instead of rat packs. After six days, I was CASEVACed with dysentery or something similar: I was shitting and puking simultaneously. Maybe the dead goat in the one water-hole had something to do with it….

So, on my 19th birthday, I was in sick-bay on a drip…..

When the platoon got back, we all got an *opfok* for being such shit troops…for me, shit was the operative word.

Things got no better: I never really got rid of the squirts in my time in Sector 10, but the medics kept me supplied with a daily stock of *Lomatil* and *Immodium*, so I didn't have another "incident".

Things with Steyn and the Loot got worse, and came to a head on Boxing Day, when they gave us an *opfok* for displaying a Christmas spirit. That evening, Steyn and the Loot found an LMG 7.62 round under each of their pillows, and at around 19h00, after Stand To, a shot went off and a bullet went right through their tent while they were in it. Neither of them was hit, but nobody ever owned up either.

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[18] Afrikaans: *Peleton Bevelvoerder* or Platoon Commander
[19] Afrikaans: *Peleton Sersant* or Platoon Sergeant

Three days later, they were on the plane back to RSA. They got the message.

We had a temporary leader-element for a couple of weeks, and then we got a PelBev and PelSers that were due to finish up in June.

Things were OK after that, and we settled into a comfortable 4-4-8-4 routine: four days in base, eight days on patrol, four days at Echo Tango, four days patrol. We ranged the area, from the deep south-west near Ondangwa, to the Etale road in the west, up to the pipe-line to Eenhana in the north, and to the huge *haak-and-steek* forests in the east. We crossed some spoor, but Koevoet or Romeo Mike always got the kills. We saw the tail-end of at least one Op: Protea, Daisy or maybe even Super, when we did an all-night forced march to deploy on the cut-line half-way between Etale and Eenhana, and then walked all the way back. We were also sent to Etale once, and patrolled around Santa Clara for four days, before being pulled back. We did our share of mine-sweeping, and our company had its fair share of mines: one of the mines destroyed the trailer with our kit going to Echo Tower, and another mine nearly killed the Dominee coming from Oshakati. I saw a Buffel literally flatten a Ford F100 at the t-junction of the *Wit Pad* and the Ondangwa tar road: the Buffel fell sideways onto the Ford F100, which ended up being 30cms high.

I nearly shot a SWA Police TIN Reserve Constable near Delta Tower: we met on a path near a cuca shop, and the only thing that saved him was that he shouted "*Polisie*!" The idiot was in cammos and armed with a Heckler and Koch G3, walking around in an area dominated by NDPs. Brave or stupid? We let him go after he showed his ID, but I was badly shaken. Anybody who says it's easy to kill somebody the first time is crazy.

I nearly shot myself by mistake on one patrol, but apart from saying that it was a close thing indeed, I'd like to draw a veil on that, if I may. I don't know if my ego could survive the detail of that being in the public domain. Suffice to say, it was a life-altering moment, to be sure.

We did normal stuff as well, such as doing rat-runs, being morning mine-sweeper escorts and doing security detail for VIPs.

Near the end of our rotation, who should join us as CSM? None other than Sparks Reyneke, with a new rank of Staff Sgt. On his way up, indeed. I think he'd been on course in the interim. He managed to get the base sorted, and the food and kitchen improved 100%. Morale went up.

After four months, we were rotated home, to a very welcome 2-week leave.

I bought a Suzuki PE250, a great under-powered pig of a bike, and went riding with my old school friends, Andre H and Lucky N. Andre was exempt from NDP, being one of the Thalidomide babies. He was born with a deformed left hand, but he came out all right, and his disability didn't slow him down in the least. He was a trainee manager at Clicks. Lucky was the only boy in his family, and had to run the family business (Greek café). Anyway, I suspect he managed to miss a call-up because foreigners were still exempt in 1981.

When we got back to Potch after leave, we were told that we were off to De Aar to stand guard until the new intake had worked out which end of a weapon was dangerous. So, until almost mid-March, we stood guard at 97

Ammo Depot. We pulled out of there just in time: combat troops shouldn't do that type of job, and we were all getting slack and out of hand. One morning, I was still so drunk while on guard at 07h00 that I saluted a colonel without having a beret on. He must have been a useless old base-wallah, or else CSM Reyneke intercepted the complaint, because nothing happened to me.

When we got back to Potch, we did some 2.4 kilometres to see if we were still fit (I ran my best 2.4 time here: eight minutes 50 seconds), did the required kit-swaps and admin, and then it was onto the C-130s at Potch AFB, and we landed at Ondangwa this time. The spiral final descent was very interesting….

We were assigned to 52BN, HQ at Ogongo: we deployed to a base up near Ruacana called Mahenene. It used to be a fish project; probably tilapia farming, and all the dams and sheds were still there waiting for peace-time to come. The only problem in summer was the mosquitoes. These bastards could penetrate a browns shirt, and they came in swarms.

When we got there, a company of the SAKK was resident, and once again, the place was a mess. CSM Reyneke, true to form, quickly assessed the situation and executed his plans. After a month, we had a new latrine, a pool, and a new mess. The NCO/Officers pub had been revamped and base security and Defences had been sorted. Thank God for that, as you will see later. There was ample water, being slap-bang on top of the main Ruacana-Ombalantu canal, so most of our patrols were great. The Angola patrols tended to be short of water though.

Our newish Loot and Sarge turned out to be strict but good (I might remember the names at some stage), and as Section Leaders, we were given more responsibility and leadership roles.

In the six months we were deployed at Mahanene, I must have spent at least 30 days inside Angola, as our base was only six kilometres from the cut line, and we had official permission to patrol inside for at least 30 kilometres, but we never received any recognition for "external operations". Reyneke and the OC had also changed the patrol and base rotation, and we did a 5-3 split: five day patrol, three days in base, occasionally a huge 10-day patrol deep into Angola, with ration re-supply on the cut-line. A maximum of two platoons would be in base at any one time, and the first night after coming back in was always reserved for a platoon braai & beer ("*Tjop en dop*"). The other two nights we stood guard. That meant that the HQ platoon and Mortar platoons did their fair share of guard duty, make no mistake, in return for their life of "leisure".

At the beginning of this deployment, we were only equipped with standard R4s and FN-MAGs. Suddenly, after a month, we were equipped with a lot of new, lovely goodies: new RPG-7s, one per platoon, as well as a 60mm PatMor[20] per platoon, and also an M-79 40mm grenade-launcher per platoon. My section had most of the skills: Richter (Space Muis/Reisies Rot) and Odgers (Podgy Odgy) were the RPG gunners, Du Toit had the PatMor and Erlank was the Medic, Zane and Ficq (a Belgian volunteer) were the Maggers. We carried 1000 rounds of 7.62 in belts, 10 x 60mm PatMor bombs, and

[20] Patrol mortar

around 7 RPG rounds, all in one section. As well as our personal R4s, with 210 rounds front-line ammo.

Section 2, I think, under Cpl Reynders, had the M-79 for a while, and then we took that as well. All these "spes" guys were picked on the basis of 2 things: they had to show profiency, and they had to volunteer. I was happy: if my section was hit, I had enough fire-power to level a company base……

The only problem with this new fire-power was the weight. Suddenly, our old webbing *"grootsak"* back-packs were being strained to their limits.

Here's a breakdown of my average kit:

5 x day rations ("rat packs"): 1 kgs each = 5 kgs
5 x liters water: 1 kg each = 5 kgs
7 x R4 magazines: 1 kg each = 7 kgs
5 x assorted grenades: 1 kg each = 5 kgs
3 x assorted flares: 500g each = 1.5 kgs
100 rounds 7.62 = 5 kgs
1 x 60mm PatMor = 3 kgs
A53 man pack radio = 5 kgs
5 x batteries = 5 kgs
1 x sleeping bag = 3 kgs
TOTAL = 44.5 kgs

I've "guesstimated" the rat-pack weight, as well as the PatMor round.

Add to this an R4 at 4 kgs, and you get an idea that the first day of patrol was a bit of a hump.

Substitute my radio for an LMG, PatMor, RPG, or just extra ammo, and you will see we all carried heavy. And apart from the food and water, the weight never varied!

Interestingly enough, none of the guys left extra ammo in base, they rather took less food! I remember one guy had an "auction" after three months: he had so much extra rat-pack food, he couldn't keep on hiding it in a hole under the tent!

By the way, the old webbing kidney pouches and the old grootsak both had integrated ammo-pouches for R1 magazines: these were perfect for grenades! I could even trust the Eveready batteries for the A53 to stay in the pouches on the grootsak.

Luckily, summer was warm enough that those of us who had been "clever" at the QM stores, could take the "inner-bags" for our sleeping bags on patrol, instead of the regular sleeping-bag. This, with a ground-sheet, was more than enough on those hot summer nights. And in winter, our water usage was less, so we didn't mind the weight of the full sleeping bag.

It was at Mahanene that I met Sgt Chris Vlok, ex-32Bn, ex-Rhodesian Light Infantry. He had been in the RLI with Sgt Scrivener. He was on his second contract with the SADF, and since there seemed to be certain rules regarding redeployment of ex-pat Rhodesians, he had been seconded to 52 Bn as an armoury NCO.

We also had a mutual acquaintance, a certain Lt A.N., who was then still in 32Bn. So Chris and I became great drinking buddies on the days I was in base, and we were very naughty. One night the gate guard had to call CSM Reyneke from his bed, because Chris Vlok and I, in browns pants, Bravo Coy

t-shirts and Infantry Berets, armed with only an R4 and a single magazine each, pissed as newts, were off to kill gooks.

We earned several extra duties for that.

We had our share of contacts and incidents at Mahanene, and for the most part, patrols were interesting and exciting, with our PelBev doing his best to be creative within the operational parameters he had been given. We got to know the 30 kilometre x 30 kilometre stretch of Angola near our base quite well….

Right at the beginning of our tour, I was tasked to guard a CONCOR road unit camp somewhere between Ombalantu and Ogongo. We packed our kit, drew some rations, and were dropped at an artificial water-hole where the graders and things were parked. That was it: no further orders.

It was an exposed position: the bush had been cleared for 200m meters around the dam. No cover. So I put our bivvies inside the huge dam, on the dam walls. We dug a bunker for the LMG, facing north.

After a couple of days, Zane and I were being slack and chilling in the bush to the north, when one of the vehicle guards called me: there was a Grootkop at the TB. I hurriedly pulled on my boots and galloped over the exposed plain. And there he was: the CO of the battalion. I was in a tizzy, he was furious. Why were we there? How could we camp in the dam?

I explained that we had been dumped there by call sign 20 (Mahanene), and our mandated duty was to stay at the vehicles until relieved.

The Kommandant was seriously pissed off, and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Not too long afterwards, our Loot arrived, looking very sheepish. We and all the road-work vehicles were moved 500m to a better position, and we were given sand-bags and zinc roofing to build a better guard position. We stayed there for three weeks, and then went back on patrol when the Ruacana/Ogongo road was completed.

At one stage, the whole company was pulled in from patrol; we were given extra ammo, cammo cream, and dropped off at Ombalantu. At midnight, we left base, separated into platoons and all walked south on different headings. We stopped at sunrise. We must have walked over 40kms. The Buffels picked us up at 10h00. We never found out why we did this, or whether it was part of a larger Op. The rumour was that there were 100 SWAPO in the area. I think they mortared the bank branch or clinic there shortly afterwards anyway. Could this have been the group 32Bn or the Recces intercepted on their way south near Opupa?

About this time, we got a little irritated with each other, having been in the bush for far too long. One day I had a ding-dong fight with Richter: I did a lot of punching, he did a lot of ducking. Zane finally pulled me off when I attempted to combine Richter's face with a stainless-steel wash-basin…..we shook hands and made up afterwards, but it was never really the same between us. He didn't trust me, and I just wanted to kill him….

We also had a fight with Section 3 when we stole their tape of "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" and destroyed it. We made peace by buying a replacement: a reggae tape; I think it was Peter Tosh's Bush Doctor. "Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights….."

Not exactly the right stuff to promote army discipline, but what the hell.

In June, our great Loot and Sgt went home: their time was up. The Loot was PF, but he had been reassigned to Div HQ, and the Sgt was finished with his NDP period. We got a very young Sgt, with a very quiet, timid manner (the name Heymans comes to mind), and for a Loot, we got some idiotic wannabe from Intelligence: a long-time PF, he had only ever managed one pip. He couldn't navigate, he had no idea of bush tactics and proper COIN drills. Nobody knew what he had done wrong to be seconded to a combat infantry unit. The new Sarge could not help: his official duty was discipline and logistics, not command and control. So the Sarge took the SLs aside and told us we could override the Loot's commands if they sounded dubious: the Sarge himself only had the limited bush experience he picked up when doing the short COIN tour during his Infantry School training to use as a practical reference. Soon afterwards, we were glad we had this support.

We were on patrol just north of the cut-line, about 12 kilometres NE of Mahanene. Forming up into patrol formation after the lunch-break, a guy in section 2, vd Merwe, slung his R4 and a shot rang out. Our signaler, Heyns, collapsed in a heap. There was chaos until we realized that vd Merwe's R4 had accidentally discharged and the ricochet had hit Heyns in the stomach. When vd Merwe slung his R4, the ambidextrous safety had clicked to "R", and the water-bottle lid had "pulled" the trigger….

The Loot was completely ineffective by then. I took over comms and the Sitrep, while Reynders and Visser, the other SL, organized circular Defence and arcs of fire. They also disarmed vd Merwe, and unloaded his R4, because the poor guy was almost hysterical.

The Sarge helped the medic, Erlank, with Heyns. The bullet had luckily also first hit the magazine pouch before going through the webbing belt into the abdomen, so the bullet had not gone in far, but Heyns was bleeding internally, and there was a risk of peritonitis. I called in a chopper CASEVAC.

The chopper relayed that they wanted Green Smoke, as usual, and they wanted a large area burned clear as a landing target. So I sent the Loot off with his Whiskey Papa grenade (can we say we carried White Phos?) to start a burn. One section went with for landing area Defence and to stop the fire burning too far, and to lob the green smoke when the time came.

And the Loot nearly killed himself: he walked into the middle of the clearing and casually lobbed the grenade UNDERHAND. Obviously, he had no idea of the effective range of those grenades. As the white tendrils start falling towards him, he realized his mistake and did the fastest 50m I have ever seen. There were burn-holes in the back of his bush-hat, and at one stage I think he was taking five metre strides.

I talked the Puma in, and we got Heyns dusted off in a hurry: that pilot barely got the wheels down. Actually, those guys say very little: "*21, I see your smoke, get the person ready*". That was about it. I said thanks afterwards, and all I got was a "*Roger, out*". Nervous buggers.

The Loot lost all the respect of the platoon that day, and patrol decisions were made by the SLs after that. The Loot would code the SITREP, decipher the reply from HQ, and tell us where HQ wanted us for the day and night, and we'd navigate to there and do all the TB drills for the Loot: recce, dogleg, last light movement, etc. We decided what patrol formations and when to move.

The Loot would bring a book and would just let us get on with what we were good at. In effect, since I was Section 1 and usually on point, I ended up doing all the navigation and formation work. No worries, it was great fun. It's what we were trained for.

We usually walked in three single files, between 100m and 200m apart with sections 2 and 3 flanking section 1, but about 20m behind my line of advance, so that they could check my navigation and formation signals out of the corner of the eye. All the guys in all the sections watched each other: it was easy and natural. We had 2 point men, usually with the M-79, I had Ficq with MAG up next to me, and the 2 other sections kept the MAG at the rear in a conventional single-file formation. We used short whistles and radio-clicks to communicate. Our bush-craft was good: in Angola we actually walked half-way through a herd of Eland or Kudu one day before they saw us and broke for cover. That was amazing.

Other people have told me: "*No, an extended line*", or " *a box formation…. blah blah blah*". We used what worked for the majority of our terrain and the risk we normally faced. With three single files that distance apart, we could never be all pulled into an ambush, or get hit by a single claymore or mine, and controlling an extended line in thick southern Angolan bush is just too strenuous. A single file with a good five metre gap between members is ample. Except for really large shonas or mahangu fields, the terrain was never open enough for anything else, and in those cases, the standard drill is to advance one section at a time anyway (OK, we sometimes didn't do that either: section 2 and 3 around either flank, section 1 in extended line down the middle).

And then, on 17 August 1982, SWAPO evidently thought that since we had been at Mahanene for five months, we were ripe for the pickings…..

The first 81mm Soviet mortar bomb landed on the base at 00h20, shortly followed by an RPD opening up on the South-West bunker, and an RPG rocket whipped past the *aapkas* on top of the comms mast.

The mortar corporal, van Coller, who was on first watch up there, literally dived out of the *aapkas* and concussed himself, and the second rocket discouraged any more people from going up. That's what saved SWAPO. Without a proper range-spotter, the mortar section was firing blind, so they picked an existing fire-plan and went to it….it turned out they were firing in the right direction, but SWAPO was 500 metres closer, and our mortars were blissfully pasting the crap out of a deserted kraal.

Our tents were next to the South-West bunker, and I woke up with the first set of explosions. My first thought was: "*Ah, Sparks has scheduled a surprise drill, the bugger*!"

We all grabbed our webbings and R4s, and Zane and I went and stood ON TOP of the *skietwal*, to watch the fire-works.

We were idly watching the bunker-guard blast away at the furthest fish-dam with his LMG, wondering why there were two colours of tracer, when we realized that the pink mortar-bomb bursts were getting uncomfortably close to the south wall where we were.

You must understand, we'd just woken up, and logical thought is sometimes a little lacking when the biorhythms are so low…

We were still debating the safety of this when Sparks galloped past in a pair of jogging shorts and a pair of boots without socks, shouting *"Dis 'n regte aanval, slaan dekking!"*. We then realized that shrapnel was hitting the trees behind us, so we sort of got a lot lower behind the wall, a lot quicker. Some guys even used the trenches.

The corner bunker got the range of the RPD gunner, who decided he wanted to live to fight for SWAPO some other day, and gapped it.

But the 81mm mortars kept on coming. They fired 102 rounds at the base that night, and luckily, only 10 or 20 fell inside. They had two pipes so there must have been more than six guys at the mortars. We had two casualties: the weapon-store NDP Corporal, who ran even when Vlok told him to stay and stand still, and who got shrapnel in the back of the hamstring, and one other, I think an officer, who got a small bit of shrapnel embedded in the back of the lower part of the skull. The doc didn't even bother to remove this; he just put a plaster on the wound. I got knocked off my feet by a blast, but to this day I thank the horrible quality of the Soviet Bloc mortar-bombs, that really failed to fragment properly. We found bombs the next morning that had hardly been blown apart, with half of the casing still intact. The tents of Glen F's platoon had been turned into sieves, but luckily they were out on patrol.

And we had six punctures, because even though a Buffel can survive even a close miss, the tyres can't.

And that's how the bastards got away. Every Buffel had at least one flat. By the time the drivers and tiffies had fixed enough tyres, SWAPO was long gone. They had neatly targeted our platoon tents, the HQ, and the LWT, but they had just been 30 metres off target. Otherwise their prep and recce had been spot-on. They must have paced off the range and mapped it out. The day-guards hadn't noticed a thing….

The follow-up was a typical military SNAFU: some Kommandant from Ogongo wanted to lead the chase, so we had to wait for this tit to arrive with his "trackers": not Bushmen, some NDP troops with short course tracker badges. Not even local Ovambos from one of the SWATF units. We ended up, 50 kilometres later, 40 kilometres into Angola, tracking an elephant that was running away from the noise of three Buffels and a platoon of troops in hot pursuit.

I don't know how we got onto that spoor, but I was seriously unimpressed.

After the Kommandant left, we did our own *"spoorsny"* with a 101BN soldier, and found SWAPO had used a large LDV, probably an F100. They had driven down from the Ruacana/Concor side at last light, off the main road, and had hidden and waited until midnight. They had escaped by following their own tracks back in the moonlight, that's why nobody saw or heard anything. They picked up the RPD and RPG gunners at the road, and quietly trundled back towards Concor. They knew we wouldn't risk moving at night, and they also knew our patrols NEVER formed a TB within the shooting-plan range of our 82mm mortars. We found one of their unused mortar bombs in a bush, left behind in the dark.

It was a miracle that we got off so lightly.

SWAPO 1, SADF 0.

About two weeks later, Platoon 3 was in a pair of ambush positions just off two foot-paths running perpendicular to the Nyati, about three kilometers

apart. Their Sgt was in charge of one stick, the Loot in charge of the other. A bunch of SWAPO came walking towards Angola, but unfortunately for Platoon 2, were moving off of the path on the same side as the one ambush group. Unfortunately, also, this was the half of the platoon with only one LMG, and he was on the OTHER end of the ambush line. The SWAPO guy on point basically stumbled into the ambush position. Big fuck up, *kak en hare, snot en bloed.* When the dust cleared, one SADF guy had lost half a hand from an AK bullet through his R4 magazine, and the Sarge was shot through the inside of the upper thigh. From accounts by Glen F and others, the SWAPO troops made a very disciplined withdrawal through a shona, even though one of them was wounded, firing well-placed single-shots. So much for wild full-auto-over-the-shoulder antics, as we had heard during training. These guys were good.

The Loot's group heard the shit, got on the radio and found out what happened. SWAPO happened to be moving in their direction. As luck would have it, AGAIN the SWAPO team approached the ambush team from a strange angle, this time from BEHIND and to one side. Once again, SWAPO got away after exchanging some fire. Luckily no injuries on the second SADF stick. I don't remember the details of the CASEVAC: it must have been difficult at night, so they probably waited for morning. That must have been a rough night.

Lessons learnt: cover the sides and back of an ambush position. Use trip-flares. Don't sleep in the ambush position, maybe rather disengage to a TB, or else have guards at both ends of the line.

SWAPO 2, SADF 0.

About this time, Chris Vlok asked if I was interested in joining 32Bn. He'd been asked to look for fresh recruits with some savvy and the right mind-set to swell the contracted white leadership elements. I also had a smattering of Portuguese from our holidays in Mozambique. I thought about it, but realized that not being a natural athlete, I'd be under permanent pressure to keep up with some seriously professional soldiers. I declined, a decision I have also pondered over the years. Was I scared of the physical issue, or of the fighting? I'll never know…again the fear.

A couple of weeks later, we rotated back to RSA for leave. I did some more off-roading, and even managed to kiss a girl or two. While we were at 3 SAI, I realized why Steyn hated the Section Leaders: when we got back from the Operational Area, we kept our 2 stripes. Steyn didn't, he had to become a Cpl again. Zane and I ran into him and his little cohort, Swanepoel. All he could manage was a strangled "Ja, Korporaal". I nodded and just walked past. Even though he was technically a "senior NCO", I could get away with not acknowledging his seniority. It wasn't worth it to take any other revenge. The fact that Steyn had been PF for nearly 10 years and was still a Corporal Instructor was enough revenge. It must have grated his arse to have that happen year after year.

While we were in base, somebody from the new intake shot himself in the old Alpha Coy toilets because he was scared of the Border. Apparently he did a shit job, and only blew half his brain away. He lived for nearly half an hour afterwards. Dumb shit.

After leave, we were told that due to the base attack and the failed ambush incidents above, we were to go to Oshivello for retraining (*"opskerp"*). The leadership believed that six months of patrols had dulled our skills. This was probably true: everybody develops bad habits.

Anyway, we did the two week "thing" at Oshivello, and scored VERY well, thank you, apparently bettering the record, until I think 7 SAI came along in 1984 and broke the score.

We picked up a couple of skills learnt during Daisy and Protea: the proper use of the M-79 in a forested area, the proper use of an RPG-7 against tanks, and the latest trench-clearing drills. I realized that I was crap with an RPG-7, but I liked the M-79 *Snotneusie*. If fired into a tree, it can cause a fairly decent air-burst. We also learnt a couple of new F&M tricks, especially when it came to command and control.

Since we scored so well, there was time left over before the end of the two week evaluation, and the SLs and leader group were given short courses on claymores and demolition, as well as three different variants of night-sight. Also some tips on improvised devices, which I would use a short while later…

Heyns, who had received the ricochet in the stomach, rejoined the company, but was not allowed back on patrol due to a piece of nylon tubing keeping his intestines together. He became a base signaler.

Bravo Coy was once again deployed to Mahanene, but there was a twist: Section 1, Platoon 1 and half of Section 2, Platoon 1 was going to be detached under my command and fall under base Defence at Ogongo. At first I was pissed off: I liked Mahanene, and I enjoyed patrols, but you gotta go where the brass tells you to.

In the end, it turned out OK, and we did some cool things. I got to do a lot of *Reaksie Mag* type stuff, doing follow-ups and detective work on sabotage scenes and SWAPO attacks on civvies. This meant checking and chasing spoor, looking for booby-traps and AP mines, looking for evidence, taking statements using a translator, and writing up the reports. I don't know why we did this and not SAP TIN, I suppose they were too busy.

We also did escort duties for recovery trucks and other convoys, and even had a flip in an Allo as a stopper-group.

At one stage, we did a 2-week mine-sweep of the cut-line, between Okatope and Etale, I think. We saw several double-mines detonated by the sappers: what a helluva bang, and what a hole!

I also did the ration run for the whole of 52Bn: 2 x Kwevoel 100s full of food and stuff! That taught me a lot about logistics and provisioning: there were pages of stuff that had to be verified and loaded.

One high-light was befriending the weapon store NCO at Ogongo: he gave us a Unimog full of interesting stuff, and we went to the *Asgat* for a day of fun. That's where I saw how really shit the Star B pistol was: the pin holding the round extractor climbed out of the slide, and the extractor and its little spring disappeared. It took us an hour to find these objects, crawling on our hands and knees. I whacked the pin back in with an AK magazine.

We fired Uzis, RPDs, AK-47s, even a Draganov sniper rifle! All the stuff we had read about, but never seen! It was like Christmas! There was a Colt 1911, but sadly no .45 ammo. We never did find out exactly where this pistol

came from, it was there when the storeman took over, but he heard rumours that some American in one of the SF units had given it in and never reclaimed it. There were also weird SAM launchers in boxes, I think they could have been Stingers, but we weren't allowed to inspect them.

I was then given orders to deploy with my group as a stopper group. There was some sweep ops going on in Angola, and they wanted to make sure none of SWAPO bomb-shelled in the confusion. We went to a point just east of Ruacana, debussed from the Buffels, and walked into Angola. I stopped at my northern boundary: about 15 kilometres inside Angola. Every night, I deployed the group into ambush positions in 3 x 5-man sticks, about one kilometres apart, along a path running towards the Nyati. We were told to be careful of our flanks, as there were some SF units in the area: we shouldn't exceed our area. I don't know who this was supposed to protect: us or them…

I used an improvised-device trick here: We didn't have trip-flares, so I tied a rusted tin to a small Mopani tree at knee height. I then placed a two-star Instant Light tightly inside the tin, and pulled the pin. I then tied a normal 14-foot army-issue nylon cord from the grenade to a bush on the other side of the path. We all knew where it was, so I could leave it there until we moved every day, then just reinstall the pin and take it to the next ambush position. It was visible (to us) in daylight, but not at night.

Early one morning, after we had consolidated the three groups again, we were drinking coffee and discussing tactics for the day, when the northern OP reported movement from the north. We put out our fires, and melted into the bush. Gradually, an extended line of SADF troops appeared, walking slowly but making a lot of noise. Their point man tripped my grenade, there was a quick double-pop, and the whole bunch of them just froze where they stood. We could have mowed them down. I stood up slowly, and with my R4 slung, walked towards the Loot who was clearly wearing bright yellow pips while on patrol. He was immediately aggressive, so I made as if I was also a Loot, and explained that they had walked into our ambush position. He was seriously pissed off that his "highly trained" troops had missed us and the trip-wire. I told my guys to stand up. The look on the Loots face as 13 guys with faded browns and cammo faces appeared from the surrounding mopani scrub was priceless. They had missed the two-man OP one click back as well.

I said he should rather get going south to the pick-up, but by the way, who was he anyway? Apparently they were a "crack" bunch of June 1981 intake troops from one of the SA Mech Inf units. I reckon the only "crack" was in their butts.

I wondered why idiots like this were used in external Ops when we had to do base Defence…… I think the issue here is that Mech Inf don't understand humping through the bush, they understand sitting in tin cans. They should stick to conventional warfare; the MOT guys will do the COIN, thank you very much.

At the end of the Op, we humped back to Mahanene for a pick-up, and while we were there, I was in the Officer/NCO bar with other guys from my old company, having a beer, catching up on things, when CSM Reyneke walked in. I stood and greeted him, and offered him a beer. He looked me up and down. Finally he smiled and said: *"Ja, Korporaal Louw, ek kan sien jy het*

baie verander. Veels geluk, nou lyk jy soos 'n soldaat". I could ask for no better a compliment. He sat with us and had the beer, and a couple more.

We were still sitting there in the pub when the same Loot from the Op walked in. They were also waiting for transport. He was seriously cross when he saw I was only a two-liner SL. But he could do nothing about the confrontation in the bush: any mention of it would make him look stupid. I never heard anything about this ever again, despite an aside comment about me impersonating an officer.

I asked about Sgt Chris Vlok. Apparently his contract had expired, and the SADF could not or would not offer a new one. The last I heard, Chris was a traffic cop in Potch. What a shame.

I spent my 40-days celebration getting quietly blotto on Baileys Irish cream at Ogongo with a great bunch, the guys who made up our little *"Afgedeelde diens"* stick.

In early December, we joined the Company again, under the same confused Int Loot, and we did a HUGE vehicle Ops in the *haak-and-steek* forests that lie south-east of Eenhana and south-west of Rundu. Truly thousands of square kilometers of *wag-n-bietjie*, acacia, *haak-and-steek*, and other thorny shit.

The food issue was a problem the whole Ops, and had started at the staging area on the south side of Eenhana airfield, even BEFORE the Ops had started. I remember scrounging a couple of old moldy potatoes out of Sparks Reyneke's Buffel bin: they were boiled in a coffee-tin, and were the best spuds I ever had!

I dunno who the Log officer was, but he sucked. We ran out of food, and started shooting duikers for food. We eventually camped outside Rundu on the main road that runs towards Eenhana, and refused to budge until we got rations. Some time later, a Kwevoel 50 with the rations came screaming down the road, misjudged a corner, and crashed into one of the company Buffels. I suppose that guy did some serious PT at the very least.

Once a chopper dropped wet rations for our platoon: now that is just plain stupid. We ended up using the engine-grills off the Buffels as braai grids. Eventually our Loot got NAAFI and we spent five days camped on the banks of the Kavango river, near a monastery or nunnery or something. We even drove the Buffels into the river and washed them. This Loot had improved somewhat since I'd seen him last, as Reynders and Visser, the other two SLs, made him do all the work I used to do.

We were still arseing around the Rundu bushes when we were called back to base: our planes were waiting. It was 20 December, 1982.

A day later, we were cleared straight through customs at Waterkloof AFB, and some hours later, the busses stopped at 3 SAI for the last time.

Uitklaar took two days, and I arrived back in Pretoria on Christmas Eve: older, wiser, tougher, and definitely changed. My initial National Service was over, but the SADF wasn't finished with me yet!

Epilogue to NDP: My parents had moved in the previous three months, and my post was still somewhere in Sector 10. I never did get those letters. Finding strangers living in my house was very odd. It turned out that my father and step-mother had bought a long lease on the West Beach Café in

Port Alfred, as well as a house. Therein my fate was sealed: my CF regiment was destined to be in the Eastern Cape!

I stayed at a friend's place for a couple of months, until I got a job, and I remember opening my *balsak* on my first day there, and discovering two-star instant lights and flares (as well as 200 MAG rounds). So I wired a bunch of stuff together and placed a trip-wire across the railway bridge in Duncan Street on New Years Eve. The first vehicle? A SAP bakkie…….I nearly wet myself laughing, and they must have soiled themselves in fear, because they nearly rolled.

CITIZEN FORCE

My first year after NDP, 1983, was quiet, without any call-up papers. I settled into my job, but things still felt very disjointed in the "real" world. In October I took leave for my 21st birthday, and I stopped in on First City Regiment, my CF unit in Grahamstown.

They said a one-month call-up had been cancelled due to bad response, so I said to the chief clerk that they should make sure my name was on the next one.

Sure enough, I got my papers early in 1984: a three month call-up. I was IT section at the Dept of Post and Telecoms, and all my colleagues said I should join the P&T Regiment: the thought of sorting mail in Oshakati or Rundu left me cold. In fact, it made me shudder.

So, I jumped on the train as requested in early May, and within a day we were in Grahamstown. The trip wasn't bad, we just stopped at just about every little siding, and I won R100 in small change playing blackjack.

The last 50 kilometres to Grahamstown had to be by truck, since the last bit of rail could only be done by steam, but the steam-train was in for boiler repairs.

The first thing that I realized was that First City was a very otherwise unit: we immediately got tam o'shanters (they were a Scottish regiment, but I can't remember which tartan they used) and started with induction. We were hammered with tradition at every turn. I also realized that 50% of the unit didn't have any infantry experience, and that we were on our way to the border……oops!

The other thing that I didn't like was the fact that we were issued with R1s. I'd fired them, but I hadn't done extended training or combat simulation with them. These were actually old FN SLRs with the old Union of SA stamp on the mag receiver. Half of them jammed when clean and oiled, let alone dirty and dry. Some ended up having broken firing-pins.

I was stupid, and surrendered my green Infantry Bokkop beret instead of keeping it: the issue was that First City would swop without cost, but if you kept the beret you then had to pay for the Tammie and chromed emblem. Over R30, back then, was a lot of money for somebody only earning around R500 per month.

After a couple of days of drill and admin, we were on the planes at PE AFB. We might have flown on 707s, but I'm not sure now.

Once again, we landed at Grooties, this time we slept at a grotty transit camp/hostel just outside town.

A day later, we were at Oshivello, in the exact same tents as when I was an NDP.

We did our retraining, and on the whole First City did well for a CF unit. Just before we were deployed, there was an ugly incident: some troops busy with a SWATF officers or JLs course detonated a Communist Bloc grenade during a lecture at the canteen: seven dead, 21 injured, I heard later. They had been packed in under the roof like sardines. I wonder if they ever cleaned all the human muck off of the underside of the roof.

What a waste.

Our final test was a 30 kilometre forced march with full kit. This is where I first met "Hasie" Els ("Hasie", or Rabbit, because of his missing front teeth), a PE dock-crane driver. At the start of the march, those of us with infantry experience started off quickly while it was cool and we were fresh, and set a good pace.

Some of the other guys stood or sat around and fiddled with kit, had a smoke, and so on.

Some officers and NCOs waited with the tail-end Charlie's, and the company ended up spread over a couple of kms.

Hasie moved off with us, but suddenly stopped after about two kilometres. We thought, he's had a call of nature.

About 10 kilometres later, we heard a commotion behind us, and this guy came jogging past. It was Hasie. That was the last we saw of him until we reached the base. It came out that Hasie was a big dagga smoker: he'd made a huge "pipe" when he stopped, and had basically run the 30 kilometres. He slept for 10 hours……

First City passed the route march test, and a day later, we were at Oshigambo: but the New Improved Oshigambo, about one kilometre down Oom Willie se Pad. The strategic reasons had not changed: they were still area domination, mine-sweeping, and water-tower protection. It was like coming home in a way.

The whole deployment was uneventful, except for a couple of things:

At parade one day, I was getting my pen and notebook out of my shirt pocket, and my R1 slid off my bent leg. Clang! The RSM called me up to the front, I halted as smartly as if I was straight out of Oudtshoorn, and the RSM told me to "make love" to my R1. Knowing enough mil law, I refused on the basis of an illegal order. I spent a week doing extra duties….After that the RSM in question (Granny) and I were forever at loggerheads.

After only two patrols, our platoon managed to be assigned to Echo Tower on a permanent basis. I was glad: most of the guys had very little bush craft and almost no operational experience. I got nervous about nine guys behind me with dubious weapons proficiency.

We made a routine of going for a run every day while we were at Echo Tower, down towards the Koevoet base and back again. Koevoet thought we were mad, and so did the locals. Koevoet invited the NCOs and Loot for a couple of drinks, one thing led to another, and the next thing we were committed to a CASSPIR patrol the next day. Koevoet duly picked us up, and I was given the dorsal MAGs for the day. First order of the day is to test the MAGs: any target next to the road will do, just let rip with the dual bicycle levers. Then we lined the CASSPIRS up in an extended line with our bums

against the Etale road, and off we went due west. With a gap of several hundred meters between vehicles, the Koevoet unit covered a huge area, and at the speed they drove at, we covered a generous distance that day. We collected five suspects, two of which we simply dumped five clicks away when Koevoet realized they were harmless. The other three were tied up and blind-folded. Who knows what their fate was.

When we got back to the Koevoet base, the next order of business was *"Tjop en dop"*, as usual. We were delivered back to Echo Tower much later, in a bad state of repair.

While we were at the tower, a Kwevoel from Ondangwa or Oshikati clobbered a cow on the main road. The Kwe didn't stop, and very soon we had an irate head-man wanting compensation from us, as we were the closest Boere. A quick call to HQ got us the "going rate" for a cow, and the Loot collected cash and paid the head-man. This was a loan, and was paid back by the SADF later. But in the meantime, we had a 300kg piece of dead meat. So we hacked off a hind-quarter, and gave the rest back to the community. We were heroes after that. We were a little unsure about the sanitary issue with the meat, but decided if we cooked it properly, it would be OK. And so it was.

Some of the guys befriended a feral cat, and fed this thing copious quantities of meat. Then an incident occurred which made me realize the gap between certain people's social standards: two guys thought it was hugely funny to attach the parachute from a 82mm mortar illum round to the cat, and drop it off the tower. The cat soon reached terminal velocity and made a small crater. I had to kill it with my 9mm (I had taken my Tokarev 9mm with on the camp, as I couldn't leave it in the boarding-house back home). Unfortunately, the SADF had no punishment for these people, as there was very little SADF property involved. I was not impressed.

A couple of weeks later, my section 2IC and I were seen sunbathing on the tower by some Grootkop in a Puma. We got a tongue-lashing, and that was all, as we had actually been alert and were scanning the bush at the time. Quite lucky, really. We used the excuse that it was hot up there and we needed to stay cool as there was no shelter.

My 2IC on this camp was studying for his psychology doctorate…..go figure.

At one stage, the Bike Squad left one of their bikes there because of a flat rear tyre. The rider got a lift back to Ondangwa (yes, the bike squad moved from old Oshigambo to Ondangwa when the new base opened) with one of the Buffels, but the bike stayed until they could bring the trailer. So…..I wired the rear tyre to the rim to stop it spinning, and we rode the crap out of that XR500RE until it ran out of petrol. We then cut the wire off the rear wheel. When the mechanics fetched the bike a week later, they were appalled at the condition of the rear knobby. We kept straight faces and made innocent comments.

I took over as PelSers for the last two weeks, as our Sgt got a late deferment/early demob.

And so ended my last Sector 10 deployment! Much as I tried to go back again, I never did.

When I got back home, I bought a Yamaha TT600 trail bike, cash, new from the dealer for R4100, with my accumulated army and civvy pay. It

joined my KTM250 twin-shock MX bike and my Yamaha IT175G enduro bike.

I was left alone by the SADF in 1985, as this was again a one month camp, and I think the cost of transporting us all the way from the Transvaal was just not worth it. I heard one company of the unit went to Lohatla for Ratel/Mech Inf training. Apparently they had a really shit time, as this was the windy season, and they had to clean the Ratels all the time. I was happy: I hate enclosed spaces, and I wasn't too keen on a rolling tin-can.

In 1986, once again I got a call-up for a three month camp: May to July.

Again, I found myself on that train to Grahamstown. I had just moved into a commune, but I knew the train drill now, and I had the necessary "liquid rations" for the trip.

I had also "scored" a military H-frame back-pack in 1984, and I had a *Berede* ammo vest from a friend, so I was well prepared.

We were hardly in Grahamstown for two days, when we were back on the train: destination Jo'burg.

From Jo'burg station, we were trucked to a base just outside Heidelberg at the Army College. For two weeks, we were given refresher courses on riot control and crowd suppression.

While we were there, we did a Table 2 shoot against the Army College, and I shot a 218. I never told anyone that my R1 had a #2 sight, which is finer than the #1 which is standard. The target is actually visible at 600m! RSM Probart was hugely impressed.

I never told him that I'd also spent several sessions at Scurweberg with my mate Brian and his Moot Kommando R1. I realized again how much of an advantage the guys have that live near their CF units. I must say, the SLR is a shooter's infantry weapon, and is seriously effective out to over 600m. I shot better with that R1 than with my .308 Mauser hunting rifle.

And then, Soweto. We deployed to Doornkop base, just outside Diepsloot.

The SLs were issued new 40mm grenade launchers with CS grenades (tear gas). It's actually a nerve agent, but let's stay with tear gas.

Everybody also had an R1 and a definite, exact number of rounds. These rounds were counted and checked on a regular basis, and the reason was because of certain racial "incidents" with previous units. But the tear gas rounds were not controlled.

Most of this deployment was boring stuff, except for June 16 when it got really interesting. We operated as semi-independent sections, the Loot with one vehicle and the Sarge another. They let me go on my own.

We also saw some gruesome acts perpetrated by young black kids hardly into puberty: murder, vandalism, violent civil disobedience. The ANC and COSATU are today reaping that which they sowed in the 80s.

Based on my effectiveness on patrol, I was also selected to help train two Natal units that had arrived at Heidelberg:

If I recall, they were DLI (Durban Light Inf) and NMI (Natal Mounted Inf). Or the latter could have been the Kaffrarian Rifles, but I'm not sure.

Giving training was a blast, but it's very scary being armed with a loud-hailer and being faced by 200 men for the first time. I screwed up some practical drills due to nerves, but the lectures were OK, and I settled down eventually. This was also a great learning experience for me, and saw me

come out of the final bit of my shell: you don't have much of a choice, it's sink or swim.

Sergeant Major Probart was now Regimental SM, and he was also there assisting. This is where he and I really clicked, and where he decided I was Senior NCO material, especially after my Acting Sgt role 2 years previously. He saw that I was way more competent that most of the Platoon Sergeants that had got their rank based on weekend camps, and who had been promoted by the previous RSM.

Our half of the company had no serious incidents, even though we had some splendid fun dispersing crowds of students. But the guys in Alexandra were not so lucky: one guy returned fire after receiving incoming, but without identifying a clear target. The ROE was clear: do not fire unless the target or enemy is identified and clear.

His rounds killed a black baby in a shack. They charged him with murder, and who knows what happened to him. It really made us realize that we were no longer immune to irresponsible actions. I told my section that they better only fire if they could see somebody's life was actually at risk.

By the end of July, we'd all had enough, and we left Soweto to stew in its own juice.

I was blessed never to go back, but the smog had already done its damage to my lungs.

A couple of years later, I had a full check-up done by a sports doctor, as an insurance check, and they noticed severe upper respiratory damage. I have no doubt this was caused by the bronchial infection I had while in Soweto, as I've never been a smoker.

Just after Soweto, a guy I met at a braai gave me a mint condition 1982 Honda CR250: the first water-cooled Red Rocket, in return for a case of Amstel. He had drowned it in a river, and all the mechanics had told him it would cost a ton to repair. Yeah, it did: a whole R180 to rewind the ignition coil. What an idiot. What a nice bike.

In 1987, I was called up to do a Platoon Sergeants course at EP Command. What fun, a month at the sea, I thought. This was the wrong attitude, as you will see.

We were based at an old Naval barracks somewhere on the western PE beachfront.

The course started off well: I was very gym-fit, I was also running five kilometers per day, as well as doing karate twice a week, and weekend cycling. The exercise portion of the course was a breeze, but that is where I made a mistake, and where I didn't play the game. Having been well trained at 3 SAI, and having done two camps with First City, I could drill squads in English or Afrikaans. I had also received lectures up to and past Company Commander level during SLs, so the conversion to a logistically-based CSM/CSQM concept wasn't too hard. The CSM marching drills were also easy: *"Kom op parade"* and all those commands.

I really thought I had passed. I was wrong: I had made two mistakes. Firstly, I hadn't played the "buddy leader" role during the fitness sessions, encouraging and helping my fellow candidates. The second mistake was chatting up the Senior NCOs daughter at the end-of-course braai…….

The rejection letter showed I had passed all practical and theoretical portions with an above-average score. But the Senior NCO had failed me for not being leadership material…..

I was crushed and gutted. I had been selected to go to Oudtshoorn, I had been an acting platoon sergeant, and I had been a combat section leader. I had given lectures to all ranks up to Captain. I was a technical team-leader in my civilian career. "Not leadership material" my foot…..

I became very bitter about the SADF.

I was called up to do a one-month camp in 1988. Once again, all the way down on the train. All the guys that I had helped with their course material and practical drilling on the course in 1987 had three stripes. In fact, one SL got his third stripe and he didn't even do the course until 1989. I was devastated, and to make things worse, they all gave me the cold shoulder. This time we flew back to Pietersburg, and spent a night at Far North Command.

The next day, before the crack of dawn, the SAMILs were started up, and later that day our platoon was dropped at a farm 30 kilometres from a town called Steelpoort, in amongst the "Chrome Belt". Our duty? To patrol Sekhukhuneland and suppress "subversive elements". But we only had one SAMIL 20, and that was always either broken or needed by the Loot.

Reading between the lines, I realized that the Nationalist government was worried about internal insurrection while their attention was focused on the fuck-up in Southern Angola. I wished, once again, that I was there and not down here with this bunch of nepotistic Eastern Cape campers. I spent the month tanning and running. I just went through the motions. On the two patrols we managed to do, I bought meat and we braaied at a dam. What a waste of tax-payers money, and of our productive time. Apart from that, I had missed my exams for my first year of the IT Diploma, which I was paying for privately. Once again, the PelSers got an early deferment. They asked me to become PelSers. I refused. If I was good enough for the job, I was good enough for the rank and benefits.

The Loot had to do both jobs, but I was unimpressed and unmoved.

In 1989, once again it was a three month call-up. By now, the war in Angola was red-hot, and everybody "knew" something. My Recce colleague disappeared for three months, and came back looking totally old before his time. He refused to talk. In the time since my last camp, I'd gotten married, and my first kid was on its way. Since the "due date" coincided with this deployment, and I was again studying for my IT Diploma, I decided to pull some strings: for the first time, I used my SAP&T "get out of jail free" card, and applied for deferment on the grounds that I was critical to operations. And I was: by that time I was the Acting Manager of the Operating Systems section of 17 people. That meant that if I went on the camp, my senior manager would have to take up the slack.

But the paper-work went in too late. I never got to write these exams either. In the end, I met the regiment in Pretoria and ended up in the Lowveld once more. This time, we were assigned to a soccer stadium in Thulamahashe, a small God-forsaken town in the Giyani area of one of the homelands just north of Nelspruit. The closest town was Bosbokrand, and the closest military base was at Bourke's Luck. We were supposed to patrol the area and win the hearts and minds.

By now, the writing for me was on the wall: one-man, one-vote was coming, and neither PW Botha nor the Nat government was going to be able to stop it. It was that or civil war.

I questioned the Int Officer during the briefing in this regard. All he could say was that we were there to maintain stability. Of course, he pattered out the party-line issue that the government's concept of a Tri-Cameral parliament and Homelands was working, blah blah blah, but the whole regiment had seen the riots in PE, East London and Grahamstown, and they all had a good giggle. We all knew that the time of camps was coming to an end. I think that by this time, the will and commitment by the average person to keep on delivering and sacrificing for the Nationalist Government was declining, even amongst the party faithful.

In any case, I only had a maximum of three camps left by that time, and I was seriously tired of playing soldier, especially as a Section Leader.

On this camp, another advancement opportunity arose, and this time I blew it away on purpose….

We were given Toyota Hilux *"Glaskas"* LDVs: a standard one-ton LDV cab and chassis, but the rear load-area had been replaced by a frame made of square steel tubing, covered with Plexiglas panels. This was to provide visibility while also providing protection from stones and petrol-bombs. But not bullets….

Like the Buffel, there was a line of back-to-back seats, 4 on each side. The driver and SL sat up front.

The engine was only a standard 2L or 2,2L petrol unit, so any uphill would mean that we would have to wring the poor thing's neck to go anywhere.

After a month of patrols, we realized that apart from the normal low-key crime and corruption there was really nothing happening in Giyani: no political unrest, no assassinations or intimidations. These guys were probably all 100% pro-ANC already.

Staying in base meant "enjoying" RSM Probart's base improvement projects.

We "escaped" to a dam and a river once or twice for a braai, but that got boring quickly. We even sneaked under the fence of one of the posh game reserves and did a three hour game-walk…...armed with R4s, but we ran the risk of clashing with anti-poaching units and the police.

So I held my first democratic election, five years before the government did: the whole section gave a great "Aye!" in favour of touring the Lowveld in the Glaskas, courtesy of our own tax money…..

The deal was that they would behave, and I would cover their arses.

We went everywhere: Pilgrim's Rest, Nelspruit, Sabie, Oribi Gorge, you name it.

We were at Bourke's Luck Potholes one day, when the vehicle-guard came to fetch me: "Corp, there are two big cheeses at the parking lot".

When I got there, I saw two PF senior NCOs. I *"strekked"*, and the Staff Sgt did a double-take when he saw my age and my tammie. He had thought we were NDPs…

"What maak julle hier, Korporaal?"

"Fokkol, Staff, ons ry lekker rond en kyk na ons land se natuurskoon".

That threw him.

"Maar wat is jou opdrag?"

"Om rond te ry en ons oe oop te hou, Staff". That was true; we were just 100 kilometres out of our area….

The two PFs decided that we were a lost cause. They left, but forgot to write down our vehicle registration, so when my Loot asked about a Glaskas being reported out of its designated area, I was as wide-eyed and innocent as a baby.

Our PelSers earned a deferment. The replacement was a guy that had done the course with me, but due to farming deferments, hadn't been called up since. He'd been called up as a SL, but now they gave him our PelSers position and promoted his 2IC.

I was past caring. I actually got on well with the guy.

One day, while driving around with this new Sarge, we stopped a black guy on a super bike (Suzuki GSX) in the main street of Giyani, about 30 kilometres from the stadium. We'd stopped for beer (the Sarge's idea, honest), and I stood next to the Glaskas with a beer in my hand (in full uniform), while the Sarge rode the super bike up and down the road.

I saw another Glaskas approaching, and right there and then I decided I didn't give a damn whether anybody saw me. True enough, the company 2IC, a captain, was driving the vehicle.

His eyes popped out of his head:

"*Corporal, what have you got in your hand*?"

"*A beer, sir, do you want a sip……*"

That night, I was on orders. I got a dressing down. They told me that the new Sarge was also on his way home due to some farming activity (planting, reaping, who knows), and they had been considering me as acting PelSers.

I shrugged. What could I say? They asked: "*What do you say*?"

I said: "*I understand. Here are my stripes*". I peeled off my sleeves, dropped them on the table, did an about-face, and walked out the door. I'd had enough.

About a month before the end of the camp, my deferment orders came in.

By then, I'd managed to sneak back to Pretoria (when the Sarge went home) and fetch my Nissan Skyline.

I was back at home the same night. My boy was born on the 27th July, 1989. I got home with two days to spare.

The next year, I didn't receive a call-up. SWA was lost. Nelson was out. In 1991, I received a plaintive request from the unit to volunteer. I wrote a nice note, something on the lines of: "*Sure, promote me to Staff Sgt, so that it's worth my while, and I'll consider it*". I never heard from them again. As far as I know, I'm still on Active Reserve…..

Chapter Nine

Brian Wingfield♣
S.A. Navy Signaller, 1982 - 1985

Brian joined the Navy, Permanent Force, and served between 1982 and 1985. After basic training at Saldanha, he was worked in signals and cryptography, first in Pretoria, and was then transferred to SAS Scorpion in Durban, where he served on strike craft. His recollections are based on a recorded interview with Brian, plus a recorded novel he made himself and some of his letters written during his Navy service.

Before Reporting For Service

In those days my father wasn't very well off, and being in Sasolburg we had no access to university, and, wanting to better myself in some or other field, not knowing what that field was, I actually wanted to try and get a university degree. At that time the brochures and pamphlets that we saw coming from the South African Defence Force, the Navy in particular were saying; `Joining up permanent force and you can do a university degree though the navy.' It wasn't until much later that I found out that you had to be a straight `A' student. They took two of an intake of about fifty people to go and then you had no choice other than to do a B.Mil degree, which was basically studying military law and that sort of thing. That was the reasoning behind my decision to join permanent force. Also, having grown up in Sasolburg and not having much of a direction in life. I thought to myself; `I want to do something. I want to be somebody. I would like to make a name for myself in something.' But I didn't know what that thing was. So; `Join the navy and see the world.' All I saw was the sea.

Novel: 1981: I was seventeen, and had the world at my feet. A common misconception among the youth of the world..... Wait let me start at the beginning.

I had just returned from playing in a high school rugby match, bruised and battered, I needed some good news to cheer me up. "BRIAN... Your call up papers for the army have just arrived!" my father cheerfully called out, as I entered the door. My mind started racing... How could I escape this terrible fate?

"Really dad, and where is P.W. Botha sending me?"

"To Potch artillery!"

Now for those of you who don't know, Potchefstroom is a dusty, dry little town in the Transvaal. Hardly the place for a young adventurer like myself....

Letter: 18/07/1981: *I am rather pissed off with the South African Defence Force. My Dad phoned Pretoria about six times before they let him*

♣ a pseudonym; the author's name has been withheld at his request.

know that they had transferred my case to the Carlton Centre Recruiting Office whom he phoned about six times before they received my papers. Anyway, on Tuesday 14 of this month I went for my interview. "Don't be late or we won't see you!!!"

I waited for an hour before the rest of the blokes arrived for interviewing then we all did aptitude tests for one hour (exactly the same aptitude tests I did at school six months ago, of which most of the answers I remembered). Then when I had finished, some kind 'Rock' (Afrikaans speaking) Lieutenant tried to interview me, and basically talk me out of going to the Navy, and talk me into joining the infantry permanent force.

Novel: I carefully opened the door marked WERWING/RECRUITING and entered the drably furnished room. Behind a desk in one corner sat an overweight, middle aged sergeant, smoking a cigarette, seemingly oblivious to the no smoking sign on the adjacent wall. I was greeted in a thickly accented, practised way. "*Gooie More*, Good Morning!"

"Good morning sergeant, I am here to apply for permanent service in the Navy," I stammered.

"Ag no man, why don't you okes join the Army, You know how many okes come in here a day wanting to join those moffies?"

There was an awkward silence while the sergeant and I looked each other squarely in the eye, then the sergeant continued "Why the hell do you want to join the Navy anyway?"

"Well firstly my great grandfather was Vice Admiral Sir Herbert Wingfield, and I have always had....." I was cut short by the sergeant, who it seemed had a tremendous respect for rank. He shot up so quickly that he sent his chair toppling backward into a small table on which stood a small slimy looking glass water bottle. Water shot up the wall and cascaded onto the floor.

"Vice Admiral Wingfield.... I think this is a matter for the lieutenant."

I waited patiently, as the sergeant disappeared around a corner and down a passage to another office, from which I soon heard some muffled conversation. Soon the sergeant returned with a bespectacled, somewhat spotty looking lieutenant. The lieutenant stared at me over his horn rimmed spectacles, and then spoke in a gruff voice, which was completely out of character with his appearance.

"So you're an Admiral's son are you?"

"Ahem... Great grandson sir."

"Well come into my office, and lets fill in a few forms!"

I followed the lieutenant to his office, where I filled in the usual confusing, red tape type forms, which to a mere lad of seventeen mean squat! When I had finally completed the whole interview I was given a map of Johannesburg and instructed to find the Military medical building, where I was to undergo a physical.

I stepped out of the doorway into the bright sunlight; shielding my eyes I saw the patient silhouette of my dad leaning against his car that was still parked at the curb, where I had left them both almost two hours previously.

Letter: After this I was told to go for my medical, which I understood to be in the same building until I received a map, which was a great help seeing as how it only gave one street name and instead of their being six roads to cross before getting there, there were eight.

Apart from that, my Dad had been told that he was not needed, and could go away until 3 p.m., meantime I was walking eight blocks to the medical centre. The first thing that I saw on entering the medical centre was a Captain (doctor) chasing a nurse down the corridor with a blown up surgical glove, looking like a 'French tickler', protruding from his pants.

We sat and waited in the waiting room for half an hour, probably for the doctor to finish fitting the surgical glove where it didn't fit best. When my medical examination was eventually over, he told me to go for my X-rays which just happened not to be in the same building. Once more I was issued with an incorrect map.

After the X-rays I had to walk back to the medical centre to hand the X-rays to the 'tickled' nurse, and from there walk back to the Carlton Centre. I slept for twelve hours after that. I will only get the results in September.

Novel: After losing our way on numerous occasions, we finally pulled up outside the Medical building in downtown Johannesburg. Only later it struck me that even though I had grown up in the small town of Sasolburg, approximately ninety kilometres from Johannesburg, I was never in awe or envious of big city life.

My first impression of military medical personnel was to be one of shock and amazement. I opened the door marked examination room, just in time to see a young medic examining the posterior of a young nurse whose anterior seemed to be engrossed in a filing cabinet.

"Ahem!" I cleared my throat, hoping not to embarrass the young lady too much. With his hands and stethoscope still firmly on her nether region, he turned to me and said "Examinations third door on the left!"

"Thank you." I stammered. I was quite astounded to see that the nurse made no effort to remove the mans hands from her backside, nor was she at all flustered by my presence.

Before me lay a long medical check list, obviously Photostatted for the umpteenth time, as some of the writing was barely legible. "What do you weigh?" The question asked by the chubby medical officer with one star on each shoulder, which denoted the rank of second lieutenant. This rank was usually afforded to graduates who were completing their two year national service, and allowed to gain some "valuable" experience in their chosen profession. "About 85kg sir!" To which reply the lieutenant simply wrote down "weight 85kg"

"Can you see?"

"Yes of course sir!" The block marked eyesight excellent received the resultant tick. And so it went through the whole medical examination. "Right now you just have to go for x-rays, and then you're all done."

Letter: 09/09/1981: *I received a phone call last week from a chap in Pretoria who told me that as far as the SADF is concerned I am being called up for Naval Training on 13 January 1982. He has sent my papers to the final hurdle ie. Simonstown, the head office of the S.A. Navy, and they will let me know if I am to succumb to their wishes. In the mean time I have received my call up papers, and they are not too bad ie. Potchefstroom 4th Field Artillery. Leonard and Colin have been called up to the same place. So if I am, by some stroke of bad luck, not acceptable for the Navy, it won't be toooooo bad!*

I don't know if by some unlucky stroke of luck you know a slimy shit-head called Chris M.-. , but he will be doing his two years 'diensplig' [National Service] in the S.A. Navy, most of which he will be spending in D.B. seeing as he can read 'Morse code', sail his father's yacht, which does not exist, is a member of the O.F.S. (Orange Free State) swimming team and last, but not least, belonged to the Sea Scouts for five years, or at least, so he told the Navy. Sometimes I really feel sorry for arseholes like him.

The Journey To Saldanha

Novel: I had joined the South African Navy at the age of eighteen, along with the usual dreams of grandeur, honour and valour that give young school boys their reason for living. There was a glint of pride in my father's eye when he shook my hand as the train edged forward, on route to the very southern tip of Africa, a very scenic journey of some one thousand five hundred kilometres. As though in a dream, I stood waving good-bye to my parents. The train pulled slowly out of the station, en route to Cape Town

I lent back heavily in my seat, and looked at the rest of the cheering, waving boys, while I wondered what the next four years held in store for me. Having come straight out of a good strict school, I found the long train journey to be most eventful indeed. Finally I was on my way to the Navy. I had been accepted without any problems, much to my amazement and great relief. I often think that my great grandfather, Admiral Wingfield had pulled me through the selection. "What time does the bar open?" I turned to face the pimply adolescent who had addressed the question.

"I didn't know the train had one." I replied innocently.

"Of course there's a bar..... Were in the navy now, rum and coke here I come."

The motley crew who congregated in the bar, were exactly that. Most of the recruits were from Johannesburg and Pretoria, needless to say I was the only one from Sasolburg.

After three whiskeys, most of us were on first name terms and noisily discussing the fate which awaited us.

Most of the lads shot off to the bar as soon as it opened, to try and out-drink each other. Not wanting to be the odd one out, I was soon finishing my sixth gin and tonic, while I very seriously considered the fact that our train was moving sideways as well as forwards. I informed my comrades at arms of this startling detection. A roar of laughter ensued from those who had not yet passed out. This gave rise to a drunken discussion about the possibilities of sideways-moving crab-type trains. Those of us who knew our alcoholic limitations were fast asleep in our compartments by 10 p.m. that night.

I awoke with a lurch as the train pulled into De Aar station, which is a landmark in the middle of nowhere. I glanced at my watch - it was past midnight and the temperature was well above 30°C. I heard a commotion outside on the platform, apart from being despeRately in need of fresh air, curiosity got the better of me. I lifted the compartment window up to its full opening, just in time to see two of my drunken comrades being chased furiously down the platform by the station master. Being chased would ordinarily not seem humorous, but the fact that each of the fleeing boys wore

only a pair of scants, constituted the roar of drunken laughter and cheers being issued forth from the stationary train.

Arrival: Take One!: The rest of the journey was without incident and I sat back and enjoyed some of the panoramic scenery of the African bushveld, as we headed toward our destination. Two days later thirty young sailors, most of whom wore sunglasses to avert the bright light from their hung-over eyes, stepped apprehensively onto Cape Town station. Our final destination was to be the Naval training base at Saldanha Bay, where our basic training would commence. . The basic training period of three months lay ahead of us all, like a fire-spitting dragon. When we arrived in Cape Town there was no bus to fetch us. We walked around and said; `Typical Navy.' Eventually we found that there was a navy bus waiting for us outside. We boarded a Navy bus driven by a jolly faced leading seaman, whose grey curly hair gave testimony to the fact that he had not progressed very successfully through the ranks. The rank of leading seaman was among lowly non commissioned officers, and usually promotion to petty officer was not effected much later than twenty five years of age.

The lethargic movement of the bus mixed with the remains of a hang over, sent me hurtling into the world of sleep, dreaming of home, my family and friends. I was subject to a strange nightmare; would I see the world I knew again?

As we neared Saldanha Bay, some one hundred kilometres north of Cape Town, the scenery began to change from the lush green of the Cape peninsula to the dry and barren landscape of the Cape West coast. Saldanha bay itself was no more than a village, with a very large harbour, used mainly for fishing and the export or iron ore. It has the few essential shops, two hotels and a string of fish processing and canning factories. Before long we arrived at the main gates to S.A.S. Saldanha. Sailors in uniform, armed with rifles, and bayonets stood guard. As the large boom blocking our path was lifted, and we proceeded into the base, I could have sworn that I detected a huge sadistic grin on the face of the one gate guard. As we drove through the entrance to the main barracks, the rest of my comrades began getting excited.

"Check the surfboards on the roof-racks guys... I knew I should have brought mine!" One fellow exclaimed

"Check out the dudes sun-tanning over there, really cool hey...?" The dudes in question, upon seeing our bus all mockingly stood to attention and saluted. I began to get an uneasy feeling. We passed the kitchens and saw young chefs lolling around outside smoking cigarettes. Something that struck me about these people was the fact that they all had the same, dull almost drugged look in their eyes.

When we arrived we saw all the people smiling and leaning on their surfboards on the roves of their cars, and we thought; `Oh, this is great.' The bus came to an abrupt halt. They off-loaded us in the middle of the dusty looking parade ground; this huge rectangular plain in the middle of Saldanha. We all bundled out and stood around in an unceremonious heap of untidy humanity. In the middle of summer is 30°C plus and about 80% humidity. You stand there, looking around and thinking; `I wish I could get a cooldrink somewhere.'

After a time an elderly, kindly looking Warrant officer lined us up and checked our particulars, making sure that we had in fact all been selected for Naval training.

"Your instructor Able Seaman De Jager will be here in a few minutes to show you around." These were the last words the warrant said to us before turning on his heel and marching away to a row of buildings from which he had first appeared. I threw my kit bag onto the ground and sat down heavily on it, as did most of my comrades.

The sweat coursed in rivulets down my dusty face, splashing in little droplets onto my already sodden shirt. How much longer would we have to sit here waiting for our instructor? Slowly a mirage began to form in the heat-wave in the distance. A creature of human proportions was bearing down upon us, it could however not be a human, as it leant forward at a forty degree angle, with arms like a gorilla which seemed to hang down and touch the ground. The creature did not walk, but rather stomped upon each piece of ground as though trying to destroy and punish it. As the creature came into range of my red sore eyes I saw that it was in fact a human being, a very large one indeed. "Right chaps on your feet," the gorilla man muttered almost incoherently. Slowly my band of mates began to pick themselves up out of the dust. "I said on your feet you bunch of dweeps!" louder this time. One by one we stood facing the able seaman.

"GET DOWN ON YOUR FACES, YOU DOG FAECES, YOU SHARKSHIT, GET DOWN!"

Quickly we lay down in the dust. Now AB de Jager was getting into full swing. "I am Able Seaman de Jager, and for the next six weeks I will be your father, your mother, and your worst nightmare. Those of you who don't believe in God, I will be your God, and those of you who do, had better pray to God to take you up to heaven with him when I kill you. I have full authority over you for the next six weeks. I am allowed to kill 5% of this intake, the military law states that quite clearly, and believe me I intend to do just that."

The rest of the day was spent flying around to the Barber (You would see people going in looking like Jesus and come out looking like a convict.), a medical inspection of sorts, where we also became human pincushions, and fetching numerous non-existent leaves, from non-existent bushes on the horizon.

After what seemed like an age we were eventually drag-marched to our dormitory, which would become our home for the next six weeks. Dean 5, was a stonewalled dormitory, approximately 80ft in length, and about 40ft wide, and on either side of its slatted wooden floor stood a row of fifteen beds, each with a tall wooden chest of drawers next to the head. We were each assigned a bed, and kas, then told to have a smoke-break. Settling down on the ground outside the dormitory, I had my first real opportunity of getting a good look at my comrades in arms. What a horrible bunch! The most noticeable of them was Patterson, whom I had noticed seemed to have very little stamina, along with a low pain threshold.

Arrival - Take Two!: Being rudely awakened by the braking of the bus, I sat up straight in my seat and peered ahead. Uniformed figures were bundling out of the guardhouse to catch a glimpse of us, as we passed through

the gate into the area of the Naval Gymnasium. One stood to attention and saluted us mockingly, while another called out; "Suckers!"

It was Saturday morning and the camp was deserted except for a few chefs who came out of the galley to stare and joke amongst themselves. Standing around dejectedly we waited while the bus driver unloaded our kit, and then drove off leaving us very much alone in the middle of a large dusty parade ground.

A voice like a thunderstorm made us all turn sharply and stare at the large muscled figure, striding towards us as though he was trying to destroy each piece of ground that he trod on. "Don't stand there like a bunch of plucked chickens, get here. Don't walk, dammit. Fly!"

We 'flew' over to the man with the loud hailer voice, who continued to shout and grunt like a wounded elephant, until we were all standing neatly formed up in ranks of three.

"You horrible bunch think you've come here on holiday. Well if any of you want to leave, you'd better go now before the killing starts!"

At this remark, one rather small fellow nearly fainted. I must admit I was hoping we would be killing the enemy, and not be killed by this large enraged human-animal.

The rest of the day was spent running, sorry, I mean 'flying' to the barber, a large variety of bushes on the horizon, and often around the camp for such mere trivialities as talking in the squad or moving. Eventually we were all 'flown' into our dormitory, issued with rags and told to polish the slatted wooden 'deck', which was on numerous occasions called a 'floor' by some poor soul, who was, however, convinced by flying lessons, never to call it a 'floor' again.

After what seemed like two hours, we were told to go outside for a smoke break. Here I met Shaun for the first time. He sat opposite me, puffing merrily away at his cigarette. He did look rather strange however, wearing a pair of brown thong sandals, a thin T-shirt and a pair of silky shorts, while most of us wore jeans, *takkies* (trainers) and open neck shirts, which was considered unanimously as 'recruits national dress'. Shaun stood up swiftly, and I noticed that he was considerably shorter than myself, with a rather cocky manner, and a 'couldn't care less' attitude. I also notice that he was the last one to extinguish his cigarette when we were all bellowed for once more.

Navy Basic Training

15/01/1982 *I am sorry to inform you of the death of one Brian S. Wingfield who passed away quietly in the heads at 4 am today. Hell, I nearly did, hey! A gastric germ in our food brought three quarters of the camp down with gastrointeritus, and I was one of the worst struck. I sat in the heads, literally shitting myself from 11 pm Sunday until 4 am Monday morning, before I decided that the sick bay was the only answer. I have now been booked off for five days ...*

Basics is getting better considering I have only got four weeks left or twenty five working days. Once you are in the defence institution, you really start going 'bossies' to be on the outside of the fence looking in.

You have to do so much ironing and be so fucking neat that you want to take your white shirts and merrily stomp on them in front of your killick (corporal), because he usually does that anyway.

The Navy is a 'jorl'; so far we have had (1) 2 heart attacks, (2) 8 cases of severe mental strain, the "Fuck you AB. ha! Ha! ... I think I am going mad .... goo goo ... screw you ... aaaagh!!!) types (seriously!)

(3) Numerous physical breakdowns and everyone has nightmares and talks in their sleep. "What are you doing to that 'landman' gorgeous ..." etc.

Basics wasn't much fun. It was six weeks of rushing around all over the place, and being chased around all over the place. Fetch that leaf from the bush on the horizon, and you do that and you coke back, and he says that its not the right one, all that sort of thing. In those days I remember that during basic training, they were allowed to give you Dorm PT, which was banned at a later stage. It was basically that they could give you all sorts of physical torture that wasn't actually allowed by the army, like rifle PT where you had to hold your rifle with one arm out at your side for ten minutes, or until you couldn't hold it any longer and your arm dropped to your side, or running around with fire buckets. I remember we had quite a lot of dorm PT and they weren't actually allowed to do that to us.

We used to have to lie under our beds and twist the blanket to get the blanket flattened out at the top so that there weren't lumps and bumps in it. Every time that one of the instructors walked in, he shouted `Attention!' and you had to stand up to attention, and not move. I was lying under the bed adjusting all these things, and I was so tired because we were getting about four hours of sleep; going to bed at midnight and waking up at four in the morning to start your training. A bloke shouted `Attention!' I had fallen fast asleep under the bed. I just heard this `Attention!' in the back of my mind somewhere, and I shot up, and hit my forehead full-tilt on the bed-frame, and knocked myself out. I was dragged out from under the bed and felt people throwing water on my forehead. I had a huge ridge for about two days across the middle of my forehead.

I remember `work week' when we had to work in the actual offices of Saldanha bay, where they did their administrative work. They got one bungalow per week to do the work and help them out in the office. I went into the office of the Warrant Officer who was in charge of the whole place. He was the `Master at Arms'. He had many dagga bottle-necks on the top of his pelmet. Having come from Sasolburg I had no idea whatsoever what these things were. He looked at me looking at them, and he said; `Do you want one?'

I said; `What would I want one for?'

He said; `Don't act all innocent with me. I know you blokes all smoke that stuff.' It was only when I got back to the bungalow that I realised; `Oh. That was a bottleneck. I had heard of bottlenecks, but I didn't know what it was. I soon came to find out all about it when we got out of basic training and you suddenly found that all the blokes were smoking it, and all the blokes were getting high on something. There were a lot of drugs around the navy.

I played in the band. It wasn't the navy band. The navy band is actually quite famous in South Africa. I played in the Saldanha Base Navy band. At the passing out parade, we actually played at the passing out parade. I've

actually got that on video as well. I played the drum, and we all marched. It was actually quite a `skenive' as they called it in those days. It was getting out of PT. When the guys were doing their PT session and had to run the 2,4 we went to band practice, so it was quite good.

That is what I remember from basics apart from the pyrotechnics course. There were two courses that I really hated. The one was the fire fighting course. In the navy you have to go through an intensive fire-fighting course, because if you are out at sea on a ship, and a fire breaks out, you've got to put it out, or you die. Basically they frighten the hell out of you before the time telling you all sorts of things like; `One bloke had nylon underpants on. His underpants got so hot that they melted into him, and now he's got a permanent pair of underpants.' When you do the fire-fighting course, all you wear is an overall. You take off all your underwear and jewellery and everything. The overall either had press studs or a zip, and they tell you stories about blokes who have had blisters all the way down the zip, and all that sort of thing.

The other course was the pyrotechnics course. You ran from Saldanha bay down a couple of sand dunes, and up a couple of sand dunes until you were really dripping with sweat with your full kit on, and then you went to this place where there was this little cement house on the beech, set in amongst a while pile of rocks, and it had a door going in, a pillar, and then a long stretch of wall, and then a door coming out on the other side. They would take a tear-gas canister, and they would throw the tear-gas canister in the door, and then your whole platoon would have to go through without gas masks on to see what the effect of tear-gas is on people. Then the second time around you would go through with gas masks on to see what the difference is. I didn't go through the second time around, because I didn't make it through the first time around. I thought to myself that I had experienced tear-gas slightly before; I had got a whiff of it and I know what its all about. For those who had experienced tear-gas, you know that it doesn't just make you cry and make you cough, it can clog your lungs up completely like asthma, and you can't breathe at all. When it was my turn to go in, I was already catching a whiff of the stuff and it was starting to make my eyes stream and every thing. I took a deep breath, held my breath, closed my eyes - I didn't want my eyes to burn - and I ran in the door. I didn't know how far I had to run to get to the other door, and I ran full tilt into the wall on the other side. It hit me on my *staal-dak*, and I fell back, and I took in a deep breath as I fell. Of course, from there, the people had to pick me up and drag me out. I just dived out on to the rocks; threw my rifle away and everything. I was choking and coughing and puking. That was one of the worst experiences I ever had. I refused to go in a second time with the gas-mask on. I told them what they could do with their bloody navy.

Later on, when I went on an officers course, one of the main reasons for making me pull out of the officers course was the fact that I had to go and do a day NBCD course, which involved pyrotechnics and fire fighting. From my experience in basics, I said; `I'm not interested in this.' But by then I already knew that of about fifty of us on the officers course, they were only going to take two guys to study at Stellenbosch, and they had to be the guys with the best matric results. I didn't have fantastic matric results. I had average matric

results. By that time I was completely put off by the officers course anyway. That's why I pulled out of that.

We used FN rifles. We didn't ever use R1s or R4s. I never shot an R4 until much later when a friend of mine actually had one that he had bought privately, and we went to a shooting range and shot it. We used the old FNs which kicked like crazy. You ended up going to the rifle range, shooting a hundred shots, and having a blue cheek for a week afterwards. They had a terrible kick on them. These were the old FN's, the forerunner of the R1. It wasn't an automatic rifle. It wasn't even a semi-automatic rifle. It was basically the single action FN rifle. You had to physically pull the trigger. You couldn't hold the trigger down and have a semi-automatic action. That was what we started with. We did quite a bit of shooting. I remember we had the rifle. We had to clean it and we were taught how to strip it and put it back together again in fifteen seconds or whatever it was. It wasn't until about the last three weeks of basic training that we were allowed to use the rifle. We did bayonet drill with the rifles, and then we were taken to the shooting range. We started out first shoot at 50 m; we shot twenty rounds. Then we went to 100 m, and shot 10 rounds standing, ten rounds kneeling and ten rounds lying down. Then we went to 150 m, and did the same thing; 10 rounds standing, ten rounds kneeling and ten rounds lying down. We went to the shooting range a second time before the end of basics, and did the same shoot again. I think I was possibly in the top ten shooting, but I was probably about number nine or ten. I wasn't one of the top shooters. Out of a platoon of thirty guys. I do remember that in basic training I did come overall, out of our intake of eight hundred and something naval cadets, I came 43rd in total, which I thought was quite good. I didn't win any trophies or anything. You didn't get a *skietbaltjie* from basic training. You got it when you went to do further courses, and you had to do shooting courses then as well.

Courses After Basic Training

In training you basically did a course of all the different sections of the navy. Then after that you would decide what you wanted to become. An executive officer is someone who would become a gunnery officer for instance, something that was a practical and on the ships. You could become a communications officer, which means that you would have been in charge of the communications, radar; ops. room basically. You could also go through the whole course that the executive officers followed - usually you would become a navigation officer, which, when you became a sub-lieutenant, you would do navigation under the supervision of the captain, steering the ship, being the duty officer of the watch etc. From there you would progress to being the gunnery officer, who was usually the third in command of the ship. So if you had become a Lieutenant, a Full Lieutenant, you might become the gunnery officer. There were other tasks that you could become as well, but that was the general path on your way to becoming the captain of the ship. You would first of all become navigational officer, secondly gunnery officer, third you would become the second lieutenant, which is the Captain's right hand man, and then lastly you would become captain of the ship.

Basic training was just six weeks at Saldanha, and when you finished the basic training, you were in a totally different world. I don't know what the

army's like, but at Saldanha where you've been doing basically the same as the army basic training, where you've been absolutely drilled and drummed into the ground, and broken down to next to nothing, when you leave there and you get into the bus to go to your different destination. About two weeks before you finish your basic training they come around and say; `What would you like to do? We would like you to join the marines.' Of course, nobody wants to join the marines, because that would be like being in the infantry. They do all the same training as the infantry guys do. Then you get to choose; would you like to do seamanship? Would you like to do communications? Gunnery? They have all the different departments that you can choose from, and you have to put done; `My first choice, my second choice and my third choice.' More often than not it ended up being your third choice. All the blokes knew which were the good courses to do. The best were communications and radar. You didn't want to do things like gunnery because those were the guys who were very strict and very authoritarian and *paraat*. I put down communications as my first choice, and I got first choice. I was very lucky.

When we had finished basics they took all the guys who were going to do communications, loaded them on a bus and took us to Simonstown. Communications is on the top of Red Hill in Simonstown. It was an old navy base that's been there since the turn of the century, and it was first manned by the British when the British were still governing the Cape. It's still run by a very old bunch of English seamen; warrant officers or whatever, and they all talk with these broad English accents. Most of them were actually ex-Rhodesians. I don't know what they were doing in Rhodesia if they were navy men because Rhodesia was a land-locked country. We arrived at Red Hill, following the beautiful scenic route up the mountain to the top. They were really old buildings, with a little old tarred parade ground in the middle of all the buildings, and an old clock-tower, and all the flashing light Morse towers all over the place. That's what you learn there was well. You're used to clicking your heels and standing at attention for anybody with absolutely any sort of rank, and whenever you did it there, the people would look at you and go; `Phew! He's just finished basics.' Then only people that you did that for when you had left basics were an officer or a warrant officer. Any NCO under that, you would just walk straight passed and say; `Howzit. How's it going?' It was very relaxed. Going from the absolute *paraat*, *paraat* basics to being in such an absolutely relaxed environment that you couldn't believe. It was like; `Wow! I've suddenly been let out of jail.' Also from having been locked up in basics where you were only allowed out twice during the whole of basics for a weekend, we now had a weekend pass virtually every weekend. We had to do a duty for one in every four nights, and you basically had to be fire-party for the base, and maybe kitchen-party where you would dish up food for the people, or clean the plates or put them through the dishwasher. That was the sort of duty watch.

The rest of the time you could go out. Once you had been there for two or three months, and you weren't a rookie starting out, you were given passes every night. If you had your own vehicle you could go to town. It was like a day job. Basically you had to be there from eight in the morning until five in the evening, and when you knocked off, you knocked off. If you were on

duty, you had to stay and sleep in the base, and if not you could go in to town. If you had a flat in town, you could stay in town. This was after six weeks basic! It was very different. Of course, being from Sasolburg, and not having any relations in Cape Town, I stayed in the base. Eventually I made good friends in Cape Town, and I would go home with them for the weekend, and have raucous parties and all the rest of it, but most of the time I spent in the base. The blokes who lived in Cape Town, some of them went home every night. Being in Simonstown, you are quite a way from the centre of Cape Town, so people who lived in the centre of Cape Town, a lot of them stayed most of the week, and only went home at weekends. It would be about a 45 km trip in to Cape Town.

Letter: 30 April 1982: *I have only one really slack week left, and then I will be at S.A.S. Wingfield for six weeks of basic technical handcraft.*

Something rather funny happened today, some FTR3s (P.O. qualifying) were rowing out to a yacht in a dinghy, when two of them lent too heavily to one side and the whole dinghy sank. They were in browns and tackies [trainers], and weren't wearing life jackets. Needless to say, we had to go out on our Namacurra and rescue them. They were overloading the dinghy.

On Tuesday the guys in my cabin (and I) got pissed, and then went to visit two 'birds' in Plumstead. If we had been caught we would have been charged quite heavily; three of us were in browns (not me), one was on duty and the rest of us hadn't handed in our liberty cards, apart from the fact that the car we went in was not roadworthy and the driver didn't even have a learners licence.

This weekend I have decided to stay in camp, watch videos and do a couple of duties at R 15 a time. I need the money!

On Thursday night we decided to get happy; we had three 500 ml. 'dumpies' each, and then proceeded to rip each others beds, wreck the dormitory in general and then fall asleep. The next morning was Captain's rounds, and we had quite a job to clean the place up!

The actual training there was very interesting. I must say that the food was very good. During basic training the food had been absolutely atrocious. We had had eggs that were fried and kept over night; you could bounce them on the floor. When we were doing the communications course, they treated you like a person. There was discipline, but if you were a decent person and you talked to the Warrant Officers in a decent way, they would respect your opinion and point of view. It was only the troublemakers who they punished and who had a hard time. We started off by doing a basic telecommunications course. First of all we did the normal typing course that anybody who learns to type does. We went into an auditorium and we had a woman in the front and she says; `Put on your earphones.' You have a screen and it shows you the whole typewriter , and it says `Right, your five fingers of this hand are placed on this side, and of that hand on that side. Now, little finger `a', small finger `b'(`s'?) and you would learn the whole thing. It's actually a form of brain washing, because eventually you learned to type completely fluently with your eyes closed. You know exactly where all the keys are on the typewriter. That was a six-week course. At the end of six weeks you were expected to pass the course, and you were expected to type at twenty-eight words a minute, with 100% accuracy. It was very easy, because when I

finished I ended up typing at forty words per minute. Your average typist today does about eighty words per minute. It's just a general standard; nothing fantastic.

Then we did normal Morse code. Again we were put into an auditorium where you sat in little cubicles with a glass front, and you put on ear phones, and the guy said; `Right. Morse code; `a' and you heard the sounds. Dee Dah. `B' - Dah dit dit dit. It started off like that. You were very bored at first, thinking; `God! What am I doing this course for? It's boring!' From there you work your way up to; `Right, we're now going to read words. Here is the word.' At two words per minute, which is very slow, they would give you a sentence. You had to work it out. Eventually you work out, at the end of six weeks as well, you have to end up reading Morse code at twenty-five words per minute, which is pretty fast. That is the speed of Morse code that you hear normally on radio band frequencies. You were specialised either as a bunter, or as a sparky. A bunter was on the flag signalling side, and a sparky was the radio signalling side. Then you could also specialise, which I did. I became a specialist communicator, which is both. I did sparky and bunter. I enjoyed the flashing light Morse code, which was very interesting. It doesn't get very fast, unlike the sound Morse code. They say that your brain immediately interprets what you heard though your ear, but what you see, your mind first has to put into sound, and then it's interpreted, so with flashing light they only went up to about fifteen words per minute, and not faster than that. I don't know why, but I found this much easier than listening to it. On the bunter side of it we had to learn about a hundred different flags and all their meanings. `Flag Alpha' means diver down. `Flag Bravo' means whatever. There was a whole range of them, and all sorts of meanings if that if you put them together (in various combinations) what they meant. You had a whole string of flags on a yard-arm, and it would say; `There is a diver down below. Please pass on the left hand side of the ship, and don't come within a hundred metres.' Those things are hardly used at all today. We also learned all sorts of ships turns and signals. You learn how to talk on the radio if you were officer in tactical command's yeoman, you would be giving the commands, which are `corpen' which means turn at an angle to the left. `Turn Left' means an immediate 90° turn. `Corpen' means a slow angled turn to the left. You had to learn all those different things. We actually learned it by walking in a squad - there were only about ten of us who were doing the specialist course together, but we all walked in a single file and the chap who was teaching us would call; `Corpen papa one four zero' which basically means that you must turn at an angle of 140 from where you are at the moment, at a true heading. Then the front guy would have to walk like that, and you would all be ships in a convoy turning like that, and then `Turn Starboard three zero' and we would turn to starboard to 30°. It was very interesting. That was what we did, and then we finished the course. I came second on the course doing that, and I really enjoyed it.

From then we had to go down and do a seamanship course at Simonsberg, which is the base down at the bottom in Simonstown. That was a three week course. We had already qualified as communicators, and we were given our little badge. Which had a sparky on, and a bunter had the flags on, but mine had a sparky and flags on it. The seamanship was very strange

because all of a sudden we were thrown in at the deep end, back to the absolute paraatheid of the basic training, after being so slack up at signals school. We had a Warrant Officer who was an absolute pain in the arse and who marched us around and chased us around and all sorts of silly things. The seamanship course was mainly going over things that you had learned in basics; learning knots, and learning different methods of sailing different types of vessel, and learning how to steer a ship again, and learning all the commands that were given on a ship.

We were on those little namacurra boats, and we were being shown how the Rolls-Royce engines worked, and there were a couple of us standing on the boat and a couple of us standing on the jetty. Sean was the only one standing with one foot on the boat and one foot on the jetty, and of course, because he was standing like that, the boat constantly moves away and comes back, and it moved away and moved away more until he was doing the splits, and he didn't know whether he should jump on the land or jump on the boat, and eventually he just fell straight into the water. He had to be hauled out soaking wet.

From there we went on a three day course where we went on to a wooden mine sweeper, and we went out into False bay, and learned how to sweep for mines. We had turns steering the ship, with the captain shouting the orders at us, to put your seamanship theory into practise.

Letter: *I am at S.A.S. Simonsberg where I am at present completing an Advanced Seamanship course which is rather a waste of time and is a complete rip off. We are being instructed by an AB (Able Seaman = Lance Corporal) who thinks that he is Hitler and seems to have a similar sort of temperament, because he will be very nice to you one moment, and then suddenly fly off the handle and make you do push-ups, and make you run around the parade ground. This is a most frustrating time for me because I will be an AB in three months time, and yet there's nothing I can do but put up with his nonsense.*

I would not like to go to ships, as, while we have been doing this advances seamanship course I have been out on a minesweeper, and I went out on the navigator which is a little wooden tub which is actually a converted fishing vessel and I was horribly seasick for the two days that we were out on it. So I would not like very much to go to sea, and I can imagine myself in rough weather, how I would handle it.

The mine sweeper base, Chapman, is not a very nice place at all and anybody getting into the Navy who goes there is in for a very bad time, because the lockers that you have to put your clothes in are something like about three feet high and about two feet wide. Now I have got a numerous amount of civvies; all my uniform wouldn't fit in there, let alone the civvies. I have about ten pairs of boots and shoes here, my motorbike helmet, my suitcases, my blankets and such like. You cannot leave your blankets out on the ship because someone just 'scales' (steals) them. There's no way of marking them to keep your name on either. (For illustration of 'Minesweeper', see Heitman, 1985, p 87.)

My friend Shaun is really a scream; he's about five foot four. He has a baby face and his hair is always too long. We were doing DSB work, ... we had to come alongside and then jump out acting as bowsman and stern

sheetman, jump out and secure the boat by the painter and make the stern fast to a cleat. We came alongside; Shaun and I with our instructor, and he told us not to jump out because her was going to reverse, but somehow, Shaun would get it wrong, and he heard that he has to jump out, so dear Shaun jumps out just as the DSB starts reversing. He has one foot on the DSB and one foot on the jetty. He cannot make up his mind whether to jump back into the DSB or to the jetty, and falls straight into the water. You must realise that he had his boots on, his browns, his ID in his pocket, his cigarettes, his everything, his money, the whole works. He fell into the 8^{o} C ocean. It was a cold rainy day, and it is Winter as well, so he was very sorry for himself and we really laughed ourselves sick.

Shaun is such an innocent, honest sort of chap. One day up at signals school a couple of months ago - you're not allowed to wear civvies up there, and you're not allowed out unless you hand in your liberty card, and then you have to go out in your 'step outs'. But Shaun and Eddie decided they would take Greg's car down and go and fill it up with petrol. So they went out in civvies, and when they came back we were all having a 'raut' (a fight) in the dormitory; we turned the beds upside down and went mad. Eventually the Chief walked in and wanted to know what was going on, so Eddy said to him quite honestly - not honestly, but with an honest, straight face; "I was working on Greg's car. That's why I had civvies on. I didn't want to dirty my uniform." He turns to Shaun - now this is how honest he is - and he says to him; "And why are you wearing civvies?"

"Oh no. I took Greg's car down to go and fill it up with petrol." So, as you can imagine, Shaun was given a few extra duties and nearly charged.

Another time, somebody was to do his duty for him, but Shaun forgot to tell the chap - he just had the chap in mind to do his duty for him, but forgot to tell him. Subsequently, nobody did his duty on the weekend, and he was given extra duties once more.

We are staying at Waterfall Barracks at the moment. You stay in a three bedroomed flat, with a lounge and a toilet; you just don't have a kitchen. It's very nice indeed. We have a hi-fi, a TV, a toaster, a kettle. We seem to be having quite a grand time.

(*Editor's comment*: Brian became very disillusioned with the Navy at one stage when someone he knew got into trouble for what he considered a trivial offence; he had siphoned petrol from a Navy vehicle into his own car. Apparently the guy had to put forward a good case as to why he should be allowed to remain in the South African Navy. Personally, I wouldn't have seen this theft as `trivial'.)

The Start Of Brian's Navy Novel

(*Editor's comment*: Taped in the week leading to Friday 27 August 1982)

I sat dejectedly and watched the others sleep while the soft hiss of the ship's air ventilation system broke the monotony of the quiet afternoon. Suddenly a distorted voice shattered my train of thought by announcing very loudly that it was time for the duty watch of the day to muster on the upper deck. The sleeping figures stirred and a few grumbled the usual complaints uttered by seamen who were unfortunate enough to be on duty. The rest turned over and went back to their individual sleep fantasies. I turned to look

at Shaun who, as usual, had not even heard the outburst from the piping system. I would have to remember to wake him up if our ship was to sink, or some great disaster strike the civilised world. Fortunately we were not on duty.

Mondays were never kind to me. "Seaman Wingfield to the brow," blurted that distorted enemy. As I stepped onto the brow, I could not help but wonder what damned foul up had caused the quartermaster to send for someone so obscure as the honourable Seaman Wingfield. Being used to the many curses of being a seaman, I resolved to take my punishment calmly. The crime: I had been on leave for two weeks, and the punishment: the duty watch system had been changed and the slumbering Shaun and I were on duty.

From there I was posted to SAS Wingfield, which was in the middle of Cape Town. It used to be an old Air Force Base during the Second World War, and then the navy took it over and turned it into the Navy's technical college. Basically, nobody knew what I was doing there. When I had joined the navy, on my joining form, they had put down that I was to be a - the word bugged me for a long time - whatever it was, lets say it was `mechanic' - it was some word that didn't have a defined meaning. When I was posted from Simonsberg to SAS Wingfield, I asked them; `Why am I going here?' They said to me; `Because you are a (whatever the word was).' I said; `What does it mean?' They said; `It means that you have to do a technical training course. I said; `Fine. I'm here. What the hell? You're paying me. Let me go. I'm getting experience and all the rest. I went to Wingfield and did another six week course. I was learning all about electronics, learning how to join components together in circuits, in tandem, in series, and parallel, making little radio circuits, and then how to work on a lathe, how to cut things on the big band saws that you cut metal things on, and drilling. We made all sorts of interesting little things. We made little ashtrays and all sorts. It was a proper technical course. Who was I to argue with them? They were paying for it. What the hell? Lets do it.

Once I had done that I was on a sort of guard duty at the base. Because I was qualified as a communicator, they didn't know what to do with me next. Then they came and told me that they were taking people for officers course. I said; `Okay. That's what I wanted to do all along. I wanted to become an officer and do the varsity side of it.' I applied for the officers course, and was accepted. I went back to Signals School where we had done our communicators training because that was where all the officers all joined together. They were guys from all different fields who had done gunnery or whatever, a couple of communicators like myself. They started off by telling us that we were going to do an intensive training course in every single field of the navy. You're going to do a two-week intensive communications training course, you're going to do a two-week intensive radar course, two weeks gunnery, two weeks NBCD fire-fighting, two weeks seamanship; two weeks of everything. From there you will go to the midshipman's course which is in Gordon's Bay, and you will train there to be midshipmen. So we started off and we did the communications course, and of course I came top of the class with that because I had already done it, then we did the gunnery course which was quite an experience because the gunners are very *paraat*, and the gunnery base is on Red Hill as well, a little bit away from where we

were at signals school. They have a parade ground which is on the edge of a cliff, which overlooks the whole of Simonstown and the harbour at the bottom of the mountain. Right at the end of the parade ground they've got a bell. The navy are very into their bells. You ring the bell for eight bells in the morning, and you ring it for whatever you ring it for. At the Gunnery School they had this parade ground, and at the end of the parade right on the edge of the cliff they had this bell. At eight bells in the morning you would have to march very smartly up to the bell, each one of us had a turn, march very smartly up to the bell and ring eight bells which went in the form of 'ding-ding, ding-ding ding-ding ding-ding' and then you stepped back and saluted and turned round and marched back again.

The Gunnery Warrant Officer was this huge bloke of about six foot nine, tall and thin but very smartly dressed, and the Gunner's also always prided themselves in that their uniform was always the best and pressed and their boots were shining that you could see yourself in them and all this sort of thing, and he said "You bastards who ring the bell in the morning, you rookies, you officers, you shark shit, you go up and you ring that bell smartly, and if I don't hear it I'll eat you for breakfast!"

Of course you know what happened to me; I went up to ring the bell and I thought; `Jees! I've got to ring this bell because this bloke's going to eat me for breakfast!' I rang; 'Ding-ding ding-ding whack - and the bell rope snapped off. There was dead silence. The Gunnery Warrant Officer said "You will ring that bell. I don't care how you ring it, but continue until you ring eight bells!" I had to ring another three ding-ding ding ding ha ha with this broken thing.

I was the laughing stock of the Gunnery School for a while. Of course the warrant officer picked on me from that moment onwards, but I got through the Gunnery Course. We didn't have to fire the absolutely massive guns. We basically just learnt the theory and learned what size the shells were and what the shells were comprised of and all the different types of shells. You get a `star burst' which basically lights up the waters so that you can see what you are shooting at and you get `anti- electronic warfare burst' that you can shoot as well which actually confuses the electronic warfare radars and all sorts of things and basically shoots down all sorts to little foil and stuff and they don't know where you are and all that sort of thing. It was interesting but it wasn't my cup of tea at all.

From there we went to radar. We did a radar course of two weeks which was just a very basic radar. I found it quite interesting because it was linked to communication as well because the radar people worked quite closely with the communications people. They identify the ships around you and linked to the electronic warfare chaps who basically sit with computers which they have sort of satellite dish things and they pick up whatever the ship is. It is transferred into the computer and the computer actually prints out the shape of the ship, the size of the ship and tells you; `This is a Russian class Caspirov type whatever vehicle, with so many staff on board. It has these weapons capabilities etc etc,' which was very interesting.

So I did the little radar course and then of course from there we went to do the M B C B course and basically I was shit scared. I just gave up I said; "No ways! I'm not doing this course!" I am really not into this because after doing what I did during basics, when we went to do the M B C B course they

told us -- that the ironic thing about all this is that if I had stayed on the officers' course I probably would have been an officer on the ship, with a lot more authority than I did have. I was rated as a communications officer because there were no officers that had my qualifications, but I wasn't an officer. I was an NCO. The ironic thing was that, years later, when I was on the Strike Craft, I actually came back to Cape Town and I was forced to go on the same MBCB course, which turned out to be not nearly as bad as everybody made it out to be. When we went for the first day we were shown films of people and burns, and what they looked like and third degree burns and how people had died because they couldn't put out fires, and what fires could do to you etc etc. Then we were told they had a simulation of the super structure of a ship outside which was this huge metal container that had three different levels that you had to go upstairs. They lit oil fires in oil drums all over this thing and you were let down through the top, on top of the fire, and had to basically fight your way right through and come out the bottom, putting out these fires, and you know, the way we were told about it, we were told that you were lucky if you came out the other side with your life or your hair still intact or without half your body like burnt or whatever. I just decided; `That's it!'. I've got this communications qualification. I'm not going to carry on with this Officers Course. I went to see the Lieutenant and I said to him "I'm really not interested", and he said to me "Why?" I have always been a very manipulative bastard as you know, and I thought to myself - I'm not going to mince words with this bloke. I could basically say anything I wanted to. I said to him; "Basically I'm only 19. I'm too immature to become an Officer and I'd like to try it at a later stage." He said: "Well, well done my boy, fine! I'm really glad! We need more men like you being Officers!" I pulled off the Officers Course.

Then I was given a little period of time where I was sent to what they called a namacurra-craft which are the basic harbour protection little craft just in Simonstown, just until they knew what they were going to do with me; where they were going to place me. I spent about two weeks just sort of meandering along on these things, and going out for trips and basically just pretending to be protecting the harbour, although you were actually just having great fun riding around in this dirty great speed boat with a double Rolls Royce engine. It's like a big speed boat and it's got sort of a double twin hull with a split in the middle and a little radar on the top of it, but it's like a dirty great speed boat. It's not longer than about ten meters in length and about two or three meters in width, and basically it's a dirty great speed boat. I hear that someone actually stole one some other time, one of the blokes stole it and tried to go to Mauritius in it or something. Typical South African Navy type.

Pretoria

From there I was posted, I actually applied, my folks were still living in Sasolburg, I applied to go to Navy headquarters which was in Pretoria. I was posted to Pretoria and that was another experience in itself, totally different to the rest of it. We were totally *paraat* in the work place, but the Navy barracks in Pretoria were in the old Union Hotel, and all the Navy chefs, who were rated as the best chefs in the Defence Force, were trained at the Union Hotel,

and everybody, NCO'S, Officers, everybody alike had the same food. The food at the mess was incredible. It was like having hotel food, because every morning for breakfast you would go in and a waiter would come and serve you. Even if you were a seaman, he would come and serve you. He would say; "This morning we have oats, we have Cornflakes, we have Rice Krispies,' then he would bring the bowl of whatever it was to you. and he would say; `Would you like fruit and yoghurt and whatever?' and he would bring it to you, then it would be bacon and eggs and whatever you wanted. You could have your eggs poached, you could have them scrambled, you could have an omelette.

The Navy HQ was in the centre of Vermeulen Street in Pretoria, and the Navy barracks at the Union Hotel were probably about six or seven blocks away, and busy traffic blocks in the middle of Pretoria so you didn't go back to the mess for lunch. You just had a sandwich or something because you only had about three quarters of an hour for lunch, but in the evening - that was what I looked forward to every evening - you would go for supper; you would sit down, the waiter would come and you would have soup, then you would have an entreé which would be a little pizza or a little quiche or something like that, then you would have your main course which would be a choice of 2 or 3 different main courses not just one. The chaps were experimenting so they were making roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and whatever, and it was incredible! Then sweets; you would have a choice of about four different sweets afterwards as well, and coffee. The accommodation itself, of course, was hotel rooms. Okay, they put Navy bunks in so you like had 4 people to a hotel room, but it was still basically a hotel room with a carpet on the floor and cupboards not like your basic training were you've got a little bed and a *staal kas* and a bare floor and that sort of thing. It was absolutely astounding. I was just your basic seaman then. If I could have stayed there, jees! I would have stayed there my whole Navy career because it was incredible. I actually got my first rank when I was there, which was Able Seaman. Basically though most people who have been in the Navy for a year get the rank of Able Seaman unless you've done something atrocious - you know like screwed the Commanding Officer's dog or something - you know you get given that rank.

Flag Raising In Pretoria

(*Editor: For a while, Brian worked at some important Naval Building in Pretoria. He reported that one day he formed part of a detail required to attend the flag raising ceremony, which took place at a flagpole - or would it be three flag poles with it being Navy?*

He chanced to glance at the surrounding skyscrapers, and saw that they were being watched by hundreds of businessmen looking through the windows of their higher skyscrapers, possibly having a giggle over their morning coffee.

There was a senior NCO who was amusing to Brian, except when he was annoying. Brian quoted an interview he had overheard, where the NCO was raving about all the interesting things you could do in the Navy. He went on to list them, but could only think of one. "You can run the two comma four ..." he declared. (2,4 km was the standard run required for SADF fitness tests.))

While I was there I also enjoyed - I played - a lot of golf. I played golf for Northern Transport Command. I played league golf for Northern Transvaal Command. I went to the South African Navy Golf Championships at Westlake in Cape Town. They flew me down in a 'Flossie' and I actually came fourth, I think, in the Navy championships. I was invited to play in the SADF championships but they wouldn't let me go because I was needed at work.

We played golf for Northern Transvaal Command. The Navy was a very small section, and basically they had a league golf situation, where the premier league was played between the different commands; Northern Transvaal Command, there was an East Rand Command; there were all these different commands in that area. Because the Navy was so small, we fell under Northern Transvaal Command. When we played golf, we played with them. Again, Paul Camps and myself were selected to play; we played together and were a league team together. I remember that once we played against a chap who was quite famous then, Pieter van der Riet, who was a Springbok golfer and later became a professional. We enjoyed it. I remember playing against a general once, a retired general, who hit the ball really far. He was one of these real old general types; you weren't allowed to say much to him. I remember hitting a shot, and the general was about to hit a shot, and he gets down and he hits a shot in the wrong way; it's going left instead of right. I'm shouting at the ball; `Bounce right! Bounce right!' This is the sort of thing that you generally do, and the ball bounces left. The general comes over to me and he says to me; `Leading Seaman, if you ever speak to my golf-ball again, I will make sure that you will not progress any further than Leading Seaman.' I suppose it was in jest, but ... I had no way of knowing whether it was, or not!'

(*Editor: Brian was an accomplished golfer, and this was known at work. He was often invited to play golf along with fairly senior Navy officers. He recounted once, following a Lieutenant in a battered old mini while he was driving his (admittedly second hand) BMW. Very ironic.*)

Top Secret Clearance

Then all of a sudden while I was there, I was given a top secret clearance. I hadn't applied for it, it was just given to me, which was quite amazing because basically in the Navy there was more English than the rest of the defence force but it was still basically your Broederbond and Afrikaner regime type Army, Navy, whatever. Basically to qualify for a top secret clearance you had to be a koeksuster, you would have had to have been in the Voortrekkers and you know you would have had to have a photo of P.W. Botha on your wall and kiss it every night. So I was quite surprised, you know, being a semi-liberal type English South African getting this top secret clearance because in the whole Navy, the only people that had it were the top officers in command of their own ships and one or two cryptographers who were employed in the communications division who could encode and decode the signals that the captains of the ships etc had to see. So I felt quite sort of special about the fact that I had been chosen to get this top secret clearance.

Cryptography Course

The only problem with the top secret clearance meant that almost straight away I was chosen to go on a cryptography course back in Simonstown back at Red Hill at the Signal School. I went and was quite surprised to find that. as an Able Seaman, that I was the only Able Seaman on the course along with two killicks, two petty officers and four warrant officers. Basically you didn't get a top secret clearance until you had been in the Navy for about 5 or 6 years, and so mine had come through very quickly. I did the cryptography course which basically entailed learning how to encode and decode signals through a teleprinter as well as a decoder book as well as your usual sort of authentication type signals where a message is sent over the airwaves; `This is your sister ship so and so. The captain wants you to sink your ship, scuttle your ship and sink it', and you go; `Okay, fine! Are you Russians or Mozambicans or what are you? Authenticate today's code which is K8YPZ, and then they would go to another table which they had which had K8YPZ on it and look down and they would find an authentication code at the bottom which would be 12345, and they would say your authentication of K8YPZ is 12345 and you would go; `Captain, sink the ship!'. So basically you learnt how to do all that sort of thing.

That was also a six week course; everything seemed to be a six week course! When I finished that I became a cryptographer and went back to Pretoria, where there was only one other cryptographer who was also a Warrant Officer. I was then sort of the Warrant Officer's assistant although he wasn't too happy that I was so young and had been given the cryptography exam and all the rest. I have no idea whatsoever why I was given the top secret security clearance. Because the cryptographer was always someone who had quite a bit of NCO rank, the cryptographer was in charge of the watch at the Navy base in Pretoria, so I found myself, as an Able Seaman, in charge of the watch with Petty Officers working under me, who were people just doing menial tele-communications type tasks. At the communications centre in Pretoria at the Naval base we received and logged and replied to something in the region of 350 signals a day, which was sent from all over the Navy by different people to the Chief of the Navy requesting things or telling him about what had happened, or telling him about an attack that had gone wrong, so having access to the top secret code as a cryptographer I often, when I had a to do an all night watch, we actually had beds in the little offices adjoining this big communications centre. We had about 15 communicators working in there at one time; you had two people, when tele-printers were printing out the messages tearing them off, logging them and whatever, because everything was carefully logged etc., passing them onto someone else who was handling a different section of what had to be done, someone else that was filing them into the relevant files for whoever's attention, someone else who was replying to them whatever. It was an interesting set-up that we had going, it was like a machine, a well oiled machine that worked. Then at night, if you were on duty the cryptographer was in charge and he had two other people working with him because basically at night you received 5 or 6 signals the whole night, and you just sat there till 9 in the evening or something and then the next morning you would go to bed and sleep and the next morning you would wake up and come back in before everybody else got to work and make sure you logged or whatever had come in. Every now and

again you would get a priority signal which would come in or a flash signal which was like a real heavy one that had `ZZZ' on it and you knew 'Oh my God, this is war!', you know; `We've declared war on someone else again!' You know I saw a lot of things like - your basic signal which came through was a sit-rep which was basically just a weather report and what the sea swell was like and all that sort of thing but you saw things like reconnaissance vehicle ambushed in Lusaka , loss of life 3 people, please advise the Chief of the Navy, Strike Craft SAS Hendrick Mentz has returned without 3 personnel who have been presumably shot dead, you know etc. You had to pass this on and as a top secret cryptographer, you weren't allowed to divulge any of this information to anybody so you constantly walked around knowing secrets and knowing top secret things, that you couldn't tell anybody, you know, whether you would like to or not, because of the security and something or other act they had in those days. If you divulged any of that information it was straight in to jail for you , there you go, end of your career.

But we had a lot of good times as well. We had a telephone in the communications centre which had a direct line that you could dial absolutely anywhere in the world. When we were on duty at night and we had `the right people' on duty with us, we would sit down and say; "Right who should we phone? Look up the code for United States! Lets just dial until we find a number that gets a reply, you know, not thinking that the United States is 7-10 hours behind us in time. You phone and someone says on the other end of the line; "Hello", and you say; "Hello, this is a courtesy call from South Africa." The person says; "Africa? Hell!" and puts the phone down. Then you realise that it's actually the middle of the night there or something.

I remember one time we phoned up a block of flats in Pretoria, and told all the tenants that they had 3 weeks notice to move out; we were that owners and we had sold the block of flats. One poor old lady said; "You can't tell my husband this because he's recently had a heart attack, and he'll have another heart attack!" and we said "Look, lady, we are not interested, and we don't care".

"But where are we to go? We are old people. We have lived here all our lives!" We said; "Look actually we really don't care. The flats have been sold. In 3 weeks time you have to be out of the flat. If we come along and you are not out of the flat, I am afraid we will just get movers to take your furniture, put it out in the pavement and that's the end of the story." So anyway we had a lot of those sort of messing around because basically we had nothing to do.

The 1983 Pretoria Bomb

I also remember the famous bomb blast in Pretoria, 1983. I was on duty at the time. I was working, and we actually felt what felt like an earth tremor, and everybody said; "What the hell was that?" We said; "We don't know!" About half an hour later, because it was at home time basically that it happened, everybody was leaving work at 5 in the evening or whatever when it happened, and basically we were leaving, we were going downstairs to walk up to the Navy Barracks, and a bloke came running past who had blood splattered on his arms. It wasn't his blood; it was someone else's but he was screaming at Army blokes, screaming hysterically and saying; `They have bombed the - I can't remember where it was now - Nedbank Centre, or

whatever it was. So many people have been killed and everything. I just turned the other way and went to the Navy Barracks because I thought to myself; `I don't want to go down there. Basically I am just going to see people blown apart. The bomb blasts were quite a big thing in those days with the ANC and everything so, it wasn't anything new. At that stage, we had all been indoctrinated that the ANC were the enemy and the terrorists and the bad guys. It made me pretty upset, it made me think that we were under threat, and all our families were under threat, our lives were under threat. I felt the same as all other white South Africans felt at that time you know, apart from the *Broederbond* and the *AWB* and those blokes; of course they felt differently. I mean, they just wanted to kill, kill, kill but, it was sort of a sad feeling, you know, you didn't know whether you, you were sort of quite proud of the fact that you were in the Defence Force and that you were doing your bit for your country, that you were proud of - your country. But then these terrorists were coming along and spoiling the whole thing. Looking back on it now, I actually look back and I laugh and I think; `What a joke!', you know, `I did my bit for my country, but was I actually doing anything for my country?' Meantime I was actually just furthering the cause of the Afrikaner Regime in Pretoria without realising it. We were so indoctrinated, we had no idea what it was all about. It's only now with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission where all these things are coming out and you hear about all the hit squads and people confess to the crimes and the murders. What made me think about the Government was, just jumping quite a bit ahead, sitting in Maputo Harbour, in a Strike Craft, with the Nkomati accord being signed between the Mozambican Government and the South African Government, and listening on the radio in the Strike Craft, a big radio, I could pick up basically short wave, medium wave, any wave. I could pick up anybody anywhere in the world. I tuned in to Radio 5, and they had the news on and there was Minister Pik Botha saying, "There are no South African troops in Mozambique whatsoever!", and we were sitting in Maputo Harbour. And I was thinking to myself, that's what made me start thinking, you know, I wonder if this Government are actually as good as everybody thinks they are, and are actually doing everything that everybody thinks that they are doing, or are they on a dirty tricks campaign behind everybody's back?

Later on I met up with someone who was in the Army at the same time who said to me; "Yes we were actually sitting on the border, over the border in the enemy's territory when that same statement was made." You know we were there. There were actually more troops there than ever before, and he had said; "There are no South African troops in Mozambique whatsoever!" which was very interesting.

Strike Craft

Then the biggest shock of my life came! I hoped that I would get through the Navy, after finding out that I couldn't do a university degree etc., just get through my 4 years being land-locked when the Captain of the Communications Section in Pretoria called me in and said; "Mr Wingfield, I have very good news for you!" [*Mr?*] Yes, he was an Afrikaans bloke and they called us `Mr.' "Mr Wingfield, I have very good news for you. You have been drafted to the SAS Scorpion!" I said; `SAS Scorpion? Where the hell's

that? In the desert?' He said; `That is the Strike Craft based in Durban!' I thought; `OOHH SHIT!! I don't want to go to sea!' Just on the 3 days seamanship course that we did, you remember I mentioned that I had been so sea sick. I thought; `I can't go to sea! I really can't!', and then I though; `Well there is still a chance because SAS Scorpion is a land base where the Strike Craft are based, but they have still got their communication centre on the land base that deals with all the ships. Maybe I can get posted there.

I wasn't happy to leave Pretoria because as I say all my folks were in Sasolburg and it was about an hour and a half's drive through from Pretoria every weekend. I had a girlfriend in Sasolburg, all that sort of thing. Or a couple of them! Eventually after much sighing, and not being very happy about it all, I had to go. I couldn't change my mind, so I went off to Durban in my BMW, and arrived at the SAS Scorpion which is on the bluff in Durban. I had never been to Durban, and I didn't like the humidity and stickiness of the weather etc., but I was thinking; `Well, at least Barry and Vivien are down here somewhere. I can see them every now and again.' I went into the Navy base which was absolutely shocking; the barracks, the accommodation were filthy. I mean you had to basically take a broom and sweep out the whole place before you could even make your bed. It was just sand and dust. It was really very unkempt. It was a terrible place. I remember thinking to myself; `Well as soon as I possibly can, I will move out of this place!' I remember spending the first night getting issued with a mosquito net because the mosquitoes were such a problem there, and spending the first night lying on a soaking wet bed, dripping with sweat, trying to sleep. It was so hot. At 1.00 in the morning I remember getting up and going and diving into the swimming pool which was right next to the barracks. What I remember most about it was that you could have a shower in the morning, an ice cold shower and put on your brand new ironed uniform and walk 150 meters across the parade ground to where you worked, and by the time you got to work, you were soaking wet under your armpits on your shirt and on your back. The humidity there was incredible. One nice thing about the office where we worked in the communications centre on the land, was that we had an airconditioner which was right next to my desk where I sat. I would plaster myself against this air conditioner and there was all this ice cold air blowing against you once you had walked in to work. The food was atrocious there as well; it was absolutely atrocious. We got mostly curry because it was Durban and it was really gross. I didn't enjoy the food at the barracks, and I actually only stayed at the barracks for about 3 weeks before I moved out.

You had a junior NCO's accommodation, you had a NCO'S accommodation which was from petty officer upwards, then you had your officers mess. The officers' Ward Room was basically like a bloody hotel, they had waiters and everything like that. The senior NCO's made sure that the seamen and the junior people came and cleaned their place and kept it clean and everything because they didn't have servants or anything like that they had to do it themselves.

The seamen and the junior NCO's had a terrible mess which basically they were supposed to look after but nobody looked after and none of the NCO's or the officers gave a damn about whether it was clean or not. There were no inspections, nothing like that at all, it was totally slack. It was just

like a barracks were you slept. It was like the old cowboy movies were they say; `All right. Off you go to the bunk house!' You just walk in and get your kit, your blankets and everything and there you are. That's your bed. You had sectioned off rooms, you didn't actually have a room. You had a partition wall between you and the next bed with a curtain that you could draw all the way round. You had a size of 3 or 4 meters that you could call your bedroom. There were communal showers, communal washbasins; all that sort of thing, no real laundry service to talk of.

You had to make your own plan. Then I worked in the base there for three to four weeks before I was told that I was going to be posted to the strike craft. From where the land base was, you walked out on to the quay and you had six or seven jetties where the strike craft were all parked. I had had time to walk around and look at them and see the people on board, but I still didn't like the idea of going on to these strike craft at all.

I was posted to the SAS Hendrik Mentz, which was called `boat seven'. I was drafted on on a temporary basis as the OTC's yeoman which is the Officer in Tactical Command's yeoman. The yeoman is the person who is in charge of sending all the signals to all of the different ships and all the other yeomen on each ship. Each ship has its own yeoman who is the head of the communications department, and they have to relay the communication to the captain, whatever it is; `Turn to whatever ... hoist the flag ... blow the trumpet ... skinny dip, whatever.' I did that. The OTC was one hell of a strange bloke, Commander --- he had bright red hair and a bright red beard, smoked plain cigarettes, and basically I had to sit at his feet when he was on the bridge of the strike craft, and he would relay messages to me which I had to talk over the radio and pass on, and he would drip his cigarette ash on my head. So I would always end up with this grey hairstyle, because he was constantly tipping his ash on my head, the twit! It was a temporary arrangement.

I was drafted onboard and we left straight away to go on a trip from Durban to Cape Town. We were four ships in convoy. I had only done it in theory before; I had never done it in practise. I had no practical experience whatsoever, and I was suddenly thrown in at the deep end and made the OTC's yeoman. They usually took a senior bloke, a Petty Officer or a Chief Petty Officer to be the yeoman. Anyway, there I was. I did the job, and I did it all right. I seemed to, because I didn't get shat on. We arrived in Cape Town, and because I was the OTC's yeoman, I wasn't expected to go on a watch with anyone, so I thought; `Oh, this is great! Off I went and jolled around in Cape Town. The only problem was that I was as sick as a dog all the way down to Cape Town. When we got back, of course, what I didn't realise is that in the navy, if you want to get off ships, the quickest way to get off ships is to make sure that you are as slack as possible, and that you don't do your job at all, and then people say; `This arsehole is useless. Kick him back to a land base.'

Unfortunately, being proud, I did the job as best I could, and the OTC gave in a recommendation that I be permanently posted to ships. So from there I was given a permanent position as a junior yeoman. The yeoman was a petty officer and I was his junior. The communications department on each Strike Craft consisted of six people. You had the yeoman in charge, you had a junior yeoman and then you had two radio room operators and two bunters, so

I was the junior yeoman even though I was an Able Seaman. I actually had two killicks that were bunters who were very upset that I was supposed to be above them. We had some very sophisticated electronics on board, and probably ten of the crew were electronic technicians who could fix up anything at any time, and could change blown circuits, and put in new things here and there.

Then I had to learn all the things about Strike Craft. You had to do a course, which again took six weeks. Everything was six weeks; I don't know why. Had to learn every single section of the Strike Craft. You had to learn everything about the strike craft, how it worked, how it functioned, the electronic warfare, where everything was kept, how the engine room worked, where the keys were for the emergency missile launching; everything. You had to learn everything from the forehead right to the off-deck, every single section of the ship, and then you had to write a test after six weeks to make sure that you knew because basically everybody had to double as everything else, because it was a small ship, and we only had a crew of fifty two. If one section of the ship was blown up, and you lost all your gunners, everybody else had to know how to do the gunner's job. If your electronic warfare blokes were blown up, you had to know how to do the basic electronic warfare stuff. I had this `task book'; I did that and I passed the exam, and then I was on the ship for about six months as a junior yeoman where I met David Noel and Cain Atkinson who became my buddies. David was the sparky, and Cain was a gunner. They lived in a flat together, and I moved in to a flat with them in Durban. We had some raucous parties together. After about six months, the chap who was the yeoman on my ship went on a course to become a Chief Petty Officer and I was made the yeoman, temporarily. Of course, having the top secret clearance, and being the cryptographer on board, I had to handle all the signals. The yeoman who had left was also a cryptographer, so at first I hadn't done the cryptography; I had just been the junior yeoman. Then he left so I had to do the cryptography job.

(*Editor*: *The following material was edited from a conversational tape recording made in early 1984 - I think*)

Strike Craft

Note: For more formal information on 'Strike Craft', see Heitman (1985), pp. 82 - 83, 85 -86, 89. Illustrations, pp. 7, 72-73, 85, 88-89.

Three weeks ago on Sunday afternoon I went on board a Strike Craft, with the intention to get to know the ship. In one afternoon they tried to cram everything into my head; where all the fire extinguishers are, how many fire extinguishers there are on board, where the CABA equipment is; 'fearnought' suits and breathing apparatus; mainly fire stuff because that's the main hazard. Where they keep their ten inch lamps for signalling, all the bunting stuff and everything.

First I was told that I was going to be drafted permanently to this boat, the Kobie Coetzee. I've been on nearly every boat in the Navy now. It's a Strike Craft which has been modified; the aft gunbay has been taken away and they've put in accommodation which is for Recces. If they're going to accommodate Recces they accommodate them there; drop them off in Mocambique, they go in and stuff up the Angolans in Mozambique (sic), or

whatever - the Mozambiquans, and then they swim back to the ships and we've got these things called 'scramble nets' which you chuck over the side and they climb up the side - in sea state 6 they would have all drowned anyway.

I was on this one because I had been appointed to the OTC's staff (Officer in Tactical Command = the senior officer afloat). He's the one who promulgates all the signals, sends them out. The other ships just do what they're told. Usually he is the captain of one of the ships, but in this case he went along on one of the boats as an extra. They were sending out tactical signals on the ship's network, and I was his 'yeoman' in Navy terms: I was his signalman, sending out the messages for him, from the same boat which would radically confuse the enemy who would wonder why they were getting two transmissions from one boat - "These two must be pretty close!"

They told me I was going along under this Commander Harrison; I'm going to be his yeoman, under his chief yeoman who is Warrant Broom, who was my crypto instructor, who drafted me down to Durban with the express intention of getting me to work with him. Bastard!

I got on the boat; chuck all my kit on. "Oh! This is going to be fun." Swallow ten sea sick tablets, remembering early days of seamanship trials out at sea in those little fishing trawlers - that was terrible.

Get to know the ship on Sunday. Monday morning, 8 o'clock, I'm sitting in the Ops room. I do all my work in the Ops room where you've got all the radar operators. You've got about a hundred of them. I don't know what they all do. They just sit around and chat on the microphones. They all sit around with about five different radars, and then you've got the electronic warfare operators who sit at a lot of computers that look like 'pacman'. Then you've got the ships signal men, sitting on the other side. The Ops room is the biggest compartment on the boat. Fifty two people on the strike craft, about twenty in the Ops Room at a time. You've got the Captain down there, you've got the OTC down there, unless they go up to the bridge, and then they just relay instructions over the microphone. That was boring sitting there. Then they give the order to sail!

Even before the order came I had this sick salty feeling in my throat, as if I'd been at sea for an hour already. I just knew I was going to get sea sick. It was bad; we got out of the harbour and they said; "Ah! Sea state 1. It's very calm today. Swell: nought to comma five of a metre." But it felt terrible to me.

Every compartment on the ship has got a bucket, which is especially for sea sickness. Sometimes you can't make it up to the heads (toilets) which are up a couple of flights of steps up to the officers' heads. About an hour out to sea Brian's there with his head in a bucket, hurling his lungs out, as on strike craft is commonly called '*braak*ing' [puking]. I just got sick from that moment, 8 am until about three o'clock in the afternoon. All the people who were not sea sick said; "You must eat. If you don't eat, you'll just feel worse. You must just eat dry bread, because that's the best thing to eat." You just can't. You cut of a piece about the size of your little finger's nail. You can't swallow it. You just chew it and chew it until it's absolute mush in your mouth, but you can't swallow it because it just won't go down. Eventually I managed to eat a half, and then I just got sick again. Then I went to bed, and I just slept and slept and slept. I slept for sixteen hours. I was having this

terrible dream when I woke up - I dreamed that I was lying on a soft bed at home, on a soft mattress, and every time I took a deep breath, the mattress bounced up and down, and I was bouncing my back on the floor. When I woke up, it was the motion of the ship. Every time it goes up and comes down, it goes 'gwaah!' 'gwaah!' and you bounce up and down like that. That's what I was hearing and I was feeling in my dream. It was incredible.

I woke up feeling a little bit better, swallowed another five or six sea sick pills, which was the wrong thing to do, and then walked up to the galley to see if there was any breakfast. The coxswain, the guy who steers the ship, is like a master at arms. He decided; 'Ah! There's a new 'roofie' ['rookie'] on board', so he said to me; "Ah! You've come for some breakfast. Now the best thing to eat for breakfast is this (greasy, slimy) egg. Have this egg with some cheese on top of it." Now if you can imagine yourself being nauseous, and think of cheese and egg. I ate the cheese and egg and got sick for the rest of the day again. That's the last I remember of that.

All the time they were doing manoeuvres. Usually the journey from Durban to Cape Town takes thirty hours, travelling at medium speed. At operational speed, they can do it in twenty hours, I think. They were doing all these manoeuvres and so on, so after two days we pulled into Port Elizabeth harbour. You can imagine two days - Brian loves eating; he's been out at sea, and he gets off the boat and he feels fine, because the moment you step off the boat, you feel fine.

A South African Navy Strike Craft.

Straight into Port Elizabeth, buy two big packets of these choc crust biscuits, and just chowed them down. A 2 litre coke which I drank on my own, which was totally the wrong kind of food to eat after not eating for two days. Back on to the boat; next day out at sea; "*BRAAK*! *BRAAK*!"

Eventually I was just lying with my head in the bucket. Every time someone came past me they would say, "How are you feeling now?" I'd just look at them and go, '*Braak*!' It was incredible. I was so sick. It was terrible.

Eventually, on the very last day, just before we came in to Cape Town, into Simonstown, I was feeling a bit better. I was sitting and doing a bit of radio work. We pulled into Simonstown at about four o'clock on a Thursday afternoon. On the Friday we had the day off and we just did maintenance on

the ship, which is basically, 'Go and scrub the deck, down at the bottom, until four o'clock this afternoon.' You just go and lie on your bunk with a brush in your hand, and make movements like this.

That weekend was incredible. There was a stoker, who works in the engine room. He was a big fat chap, but he lost quite a bit of weight as well because he was also very sea sick. He and I went in to Cape Town that night, and he loves good food as well - we went to one of these 'Apache Spurs' (Burger houses) and we had mushroom burgers and waffles and ice cream. Anything we could chow, we just chowed It was fantastic. I went to movies and all kinds of stuff.

Part one of the big ordeal starts the following Monday. I woke up on the Monday morning knowing that I have to go to sea today. Mmm, wonderful! I got up and I went to see Warrant Broom, and I said to him, "Warrant, what's happening today?"

He says to me, "Ah. Just go over to boat six, Oswald Pirrow - we went down on Kobie Coetzee. Go over to Oswald Pirrow. The Lieutenant on board says he wants to see you. The first Lieutenant."

I ask, "What does he want to see me for?"

Warrant Broom: "Mmmmm Mmmmm Muuumm. I dunno. Just go and see what the fucker wants."

Off I go. Get to the boat. Climb on board. Go to the first Lieutenant, and say to him, "Sir, you want to see me?"

He says to me: "Who the hell are you?"

"Able Seaman Wingfield, Sir. You wanted to see me."

"Oh, yes! You!"

"Me? What have I done?"

He says to me: "No, I want you to take an A52 radio, which is a little portable radio, and go to the tug, and you're going to play 'Coms' (Communications) today. The tug is going to tow the target for the Strike Craft and we're going to shoot at it."

"Whaaat?!? You're going to shoot at the tug?"

"No, we're going to shoot at the target."

"But the tug's towing the target."

He says, "Ah, but they tow it at about a thousand metres."

"Phew!"

So off I go to the tug, climb onboard the tug. As I get onboard the tug, here's this civvy standing on the tug, long greasy hair hanging down on his shoulders, blond hair. Dirty old ripped open T-shirt, jeans and tackies. I walk on to the ship and I look at this guy and I think 'Oh! One of the deck hands. I say to him; "Excuse me, I'm looking for the Captain."

He says, "Ah, I am the Captain."

I looked at him. Oh! That's nice!' I tell him, "I'm coming to play 'Coms' for you today."

He says, "Ah! Fucking waste of time."

A coloured crew of about six or seven guys. The tug was very nice. All the other craft have these telegraph - 'half ahead ting ting' and turn the wheel and all this. The tug was like a motor boat, it had an accelerator, which is grand.

So he was busy playing with the tug. We were just busy pulling out of Simonstown harbour, going past the lighthouse, when I looked down in the water and saw what looked like a tailor's dummy floating in the water.

The Captain says to me, "Was that a body?"

"Ah, a body. No. It looked like a doll or something. It's got no hair on it; it's just like plastic."

He said, "We'd better go and have a look," so he turns the tug around and we come past. It's a body lying face down in the water. He said it had been there for about three days because it was absolutely white, waterlogged. All the hair had fallen out. Luckily it was facing down, otherwise we would have seen the eyes peeling out, or probably they had already been eaten out, and its legs were already shredded, little fish had eaten off strips. It still had a pair of tackies on. It wasn't much fun to observe, but it didn't affect me at all.

He called the harbour patrol on the radio, and they came out with two civvy police and chucked a groundsheet under the thing to pick it up, because otherwise if you pull it up by the arm, the arm just comes off. They confirmed that it was a fisherman who had been drowned.

It was a nice way to start the day - go out target shooting and find dead bodies! I asked the Captain about how well the Strike Craft could shoot. He said we were lucky it was the Strike Craft shooting. "Last time it was the PP (President Pretorius, a frigate) shooting, and they nearly hit us."

We went out to Cape Point - we stopped just off the 'Point' because the shoot was scheduled for 1.30 in the afternoon. It was about eleven o'clock, so we just stopped there, and the crew were fishing over the side. The Captain is lying back with a cigarette in his mouth with his feet up on the bunk, listening to 'Radio 5' on the network that he's supposed to be listening in for the Strike Craft on. I felt I might as well join them, so I parked there catching some fish - I didn't catch anything though.

One thirty comes and the Strike Craft radio us, and tell us to shoot across the bay - towing the target, and they're going to shoot at it. So off we go across the bay. Suddenly two fishing vessels loom up on the horizon, just on our starboard bow.

I say to the Captain, "Shouldn't we tell the Strike Craft about those two?"

He says, "Ach, no. They're far away man."

The first Strike Craft shoots. Dwoofff! From where we were it looked about a hundred metres from the fishing trawler.

I come up on the 'net', and I say, 'This is Alpha Juliet so and so, Tug. Cease firing. Cease firing. You are shooting at fishing vessel.'

The one guy comes up. He says, "Ah, sorry. We wondered. We had two contacts on our radar scanner. We wondered which one was the target," obviously shooting at the wrong one. I was thinking that it could have been the tug. These massive shells exploding in the sea. Bgggg! Next to this fishing trawler. Russian spies on the fishing trawler; "Yaa! We give up."

So we waited for them to get out of the way, and the rest of the day was okay. Night falls. At about seven o'clock that night we pull back into harbour; the tug. Myself and the civvy Captain.

Warrant Broom is on Oswald Pirrow. He was observing the shoot with the OTC. My boat, the Kobie Coetzee, the one we had come down on, the one we had been drafted to, is in the harbour. He didn't go out that day. I got my

kit off the tug, and I go over to Kobie Coetzee, and Kobie Coetzee's engines are revving up, and its navigation lights are on and everyone is standing around on the quay with ropes, throwing them to the boat. I'm just about to jump onboard and the Captain says to me, "Where are you going?"

I say to him, "I'm coming onboard. It's my ship!"

So he says to me, "No, it's not!"

I stood there very bewildered. I said to him, "What do you mean, Sir?"

He says to me, "I'm very sorry. We're going on a special mission. Very hush hush and everything, and you're working for the OTC so just stay on the quay until they come back."

So I just stood on the quay and watched my ship go off to Mozambique or Angola or wherever it was. I stood on the quay until 11.30 that night, waiting for the other Strike Craft to come back. Strike Craft pulls in. Warrant Broom gets off, "Mumble mumble mumble eleven thirty mumble mumble could have been at home mumble mumble could have been ashore mumble mumble could have been drinking." He comes over to me and he says, "Take these books over to Kobie Coetzee."

I say to him, "(chuckle) There's where Kobie Coetzee was."

He looks. "Where the bloody hell have they gone?"

"I'm sorry. They've gone off on a Special Ops."

He says; "My bloody kit's onboard!"

I told him I couldn't do anything. When I came back on the tug, they were busy pulling out. He's raving there; "Bloody hell. Raar! Raar! Monty Python terms *'en alles'* [and everything]," going crazy there. He's just got the pair of 'blues' he's wearing, and nothing else. All his kit's on there, his shaving stuff, everything. We go over to the MSO Chapman to find out what's happening and they tell us; "No. The boat's gone off for about two or three weeks." Warrant, next day, off to 'slops' (stores) to go and get all new kit, and he has to buy it. So they tell us we'll have to go over to the P.P. President Pretorius. (Heitman, 1985, pp. 81). That's that dirty great battleship (frigate) like the President Kruger that was sunk (Heitman, 1985, p. 84). All my friends are on there ... Michael, Shaun, the whole bunch of them. I thought this was going to be great.

I went over there and went onboard. The coxswain asks, "How long are you guys here for?" so we say, "No, we're just temporary. We're probably just here for the day. Sleep overnight, and leave tomorrow morning, or something like that."

He says; "Ah! That's okay." It's much better on the P.P. because you can go up to the bridge, and that's where they send the signals from. I was parking up on the bridge. It's grand because you can watch everything happening around you.

The first day we were on the P.P. the OTC misunderstood the signal, and he went off on the Oswald Pirrow. His staff is on the P.P. and he's on the Oswald Pirrow. We didn't do anything the whole day, Warrant Broom and myself, we just parked off - and drank coke from the canteen all day, and just lay around.

The P.P. has big messes and they have hammocks - try and sleep in a hammock! I decided that I wasn't going to sleep in a hammock because I would fall out and dash my brains to pieces on the floor, so I got a stretcher; a

normal camp stretcher - I had to tie it to a cupboard so it didn't slide away in the middle of the night. I slept on that thing - very uncomfortable.

We went out on the P.P. and sent a few signals, and then they had a gunnery shoot. Two Strike Craft, one on either side of us, with the P.P. in the middle. They asked me if I wanted to watch the shoot. I asked what they would be shooting at. 'Drogues'

"What?"

"Drogues."

"Drogues?" Something like dragons? It's a long balloon that they tow behind the Shackeltons (Heitman, 1985, p. 62, 70.), and then they shoot at the thing. That was piss-willy stuff! Then they got hold of these radio controlled aircraft, that cost R 36 000.00 each. They wind it up on the P.P. and off it goes up in the air. It's quite big; about the size of a motor car. They're controlling it from the P.P., and the Strike Craft shoot at it first, and they've got these guns that are locked in with the computer. They were not trying to hit the thing, they were just shooting bursts underneath it. It was excellent shooting. It was brilliant to watch. You see the thing fly over and then you see 'Gwoof Gwoof!' like flack burst underneath it. Brilliant. Just like watching a war movie. It was grand, hey!

Then they opened up with the close range battery. I was standing right next to the thing, and then the 7.6 machine guns with the double barrels - massive things right next to my ear. The vibrations were incredible.

Then it is the turn of the P.P. to shoot. It was just a close range shot, and then they come with their Bofors cannons. The guys are sitting at the Bofors - the thing goes over. They haven't got a computer to lock into - they're told to shoot just underneath it. R 36 000.00 worth of equipment. Goof! Goof! Goof! The whole thing explodes, and goes crashing down into the sea, right next to the P.P. The guy shooting the Bofors jumps up, makes a war whoop. Yeahhh Yeahhh! Everyone on the P.P. Yeahh Yeahh! The guy controlling the thing: "Thirty six thousand rand ..." Shaking his head. Eventually they shot down two of them. They had about six on board. They shot down two of them, and the others ran out of petrol and they just hauled them back onboard again. That was quite a grand day.

The next week we went to Saldanha, and I was onboard Oswald Pirrow again. We got there, and we were just parking off. The next day we went out to sea. It was sea state 5; Strike Craft do not operate in anything more than four, because then even the Captain gets sick. We went out and it was like surfing. You can't walk, you have to hang on to everything. There's nowhere to eat, so you just lean against the wall, and you're chowing, and the next minute you are running over to the other side; just turn your back and smash into the wall, stand there, eat a few mouthfuls, and then run back to the other side. Or you come down the stairs with a plate of food in one hand and an ice cream in the other - you spill everything.

Then next day we went out on manoeuvres. We pulled out into the bay - sea state 5, swell: 3 to 4 metres. Terrible! Then they said we would go back to harbour; we would have a lovely day there parking in the sunshine, but just then there came a distress signal from a yacht, 180 km off the coast somewhere near Walvis Bay.

They say, "Well boys, who's going?" We draw lots; sitting there praying it's not us. "It has been decided that the Oswald Pirrow will go out."

"Shit! What boat are we on again?"

"Pirrow"

"Aaaagh!" So off we go to sea on the S.A.S. Oswald Pirrow. As we headed out, I heard the weather 'SitRep' (weather report): "Sea state 5, swell, 4 to 5 metres. Gale force winds, speed 60 to 70 knots, and headswells." I ran straight for the heads and just parked there, *braak*ing. (On the way back we had a *braak* cricket team. It was quite fun. We had a little score board; they've got the operations board where they've got all the calls signs and everything on, and they've got there '*Braak* team A' and "*Braak* team B' - 'A' was the port watch, and 'B' was the starboard watch. Every time you come on watch, they see how many times one of the guys can go and *braak*. Eventually we lost by about thirteen to fourteen, because one chap really walked away with the honours. He was just in the heads all the time.

We got out to the yacht at about two o'clock in the afternoon, and the yacht Captain - cheeky bastard - told us, "We'd like a tow into Port Nolloth please."

So we told him, "We're terribly sorry, this is the SAN. We will take you in to Saldanha Bay, which is where we are heading."

So the chap says to us, "I'm terribly sorry, but we'd like a tow into Port Nolloth."

So we said to him, "Well, we're terribly sorry then. We're going to have to leave you here and let you drown." Eventually he accepted a tow back to Saldanha, after much bickering and fighting, so off we go with this massive rope astern of us, towing this yacht. So we head off at about ten knots and the yacht is doing nose-dives on all the swells and jumping up and down like a trampoline.

The Captain of the yacht comes *braak*ing over the air, "Please slow down because we're not handling it back here. So we slowed down to about four knots, which was incredible in the state we were in because the swells were so big - if you're going fast you can more or less plane over the swells and just catch the tail ends of them which just sort of bounce you up so that you touch the ceiling, but this way you go right down into the swell, and then you go up four or five metres and then you come right down the swell again. Needless to say, a lot of people *braaked* all the way back.

We got back into Saldanha harbour at about six in the evening, to be interviewed by Charl Pauw (television reporter). Our captain had a little chat with Charl Pauw, and they showed a couple of the crew members. Unfortunately I wasn't there, due to some ailment.

The next day, Friday, we had a sports day which was great fun because they decided, "Right! Who'd like to play cricket?"

Brian: "I'd love to play cricket. I haven't played cricket since high school." Lying of course; he's never played cricket in his life before, although he had played in the back garden with his sister. All the chaps put my name down for the team from S.A.S. Oswald Pirrow, playing against S.A.S. Hendrik Mentz. We get out on the cricket field and S.A.S. Hendrik Mentz is first up to bat, and we are out there bowling and fielding. I didn't do any bowling because I didn't want to embarrass myself, but I was doing some

pretty good fielding. Really, I was. We took them all out for 111 runs. It might not mean that much to you, but if you're a cricket enthusiast, you'll know that it's a pretty poor score.

Full of confidence, our opening batsman walked out on to the field to be bowled out for the first ball by the skipper of their team who also happens to play for Natal. By this time Brian is sitting there feeling very apprehensive, knowing that there's this chap out there bowling at 160 km per hour cricket balls at the chap batting, and you haven't got much padding, and you're not wearing these safety helmets. It carries on at a progressive rate and eventually about seven of our players are out for twenty runs, and it's Brian's turn to bat.

He walks in bravely, putting the cricket box into his pants, steps up on to the cricket pitch and faces the first ball which he doesn't even see but swings wildly in the air, and is merely caught behind the wickets by the wicket keeper. Second ball he manages to see, and he gives a big wack and the ball goes running straight past the wicket, and he runs joyously thinking, 'Wonderful. I actually managed to hit the ball.' I run up to the wicket on the other side, get there and decide that it was just one run. It's not two runs. I am not going to run back to the other side of the wicket, so I turn around. Meanwhile the other chap batting is halfway back across the pitch already, so I have to run. I start sprinting to the other side, but they threw the ball in and I was caught out for no runs.

Final Score: S.A.S. Hendrik Mentz 115, S.A.S. Oswald Pirrow 25, which in cricket terms is pathetic.

After that we had our RPG where the Captain was slammed. He gave twelve people a lift home in his mini - an R mini - which didn't go very well with three or four on the roof, one or two on the front seat, three or four on the back seat, and one or two on the window sills which was quite fun. Then the first Lieutenant of the Hendrik Mentz got locked in jail for trying to steal a dinghy, and when questioned by the police about why he was stealing the dinghy he said that he liked it and wanted to take it back to Durban with him. He was let out on fifty Rand bail when they found out who he was.

The following day, which was Saturday, they had the passing out parade of the roofies from Saldanha, which was quite fun because we went there and laughed, and thought to ourselves, 'Gee! Were we actually like that once?'

Then, at 2 p.m. on Saturday afternoon we set sail for Durban. Luckily on the way back I did not *braak* once, and I felt great. The sea was rough; the sea was sea state 5 and 6 the whole way. Once, I was lying, trying to fall asleep and having a bad dream, thinking to myself that I was lying on a very soft bed at home and every time I breathed in, my back touched the floor (ED: haven't we had this story above?) and when I breathed out, it went up again. It was a terrible feeling. When I woke up I was bouncing on the bunk. You can hear a swell; the ship starts creaking - one terrible swell came up. I just closed my eyes and I prayed. One of my friends sleeping on the top bunk of three, shot out of his bunk, did a somersault, and landed on his head on the floor. I was lying wedged between two mattresses - one on either side of me, was shot up in the air, landed on a table which was next to me, shot off the table, landed on the one mattress sideways - bounced off it onto the other mattress, and back down on to the mattress I was lying on, thinking, "Oh! What a lovely ride."

One of the 'ou manne' (old hands) piped up out of the cabin, "Is everybody all right?" This was something I hadn't heard before so it must have been a pretty bad swell. We pulled back into harbour on Monday morning at 9 am.

Additional Anecdotes:

Going past the Transkei Coast at two o'clock in the morning, the first Lieutenant pipes up to the Captain on the piping system, he says, "Command, this is the PO. Confirm we have a Transkeian strike craft approaching us on the port beam."

The Captain says, "What's he doing on our port beam?"

"He's trying to flog us third party discs."

The Captain says, "We'll take two. ... How do you know it's a Transkeian strike craft?"

"It's the one with a roof rack on."

The one chap was a Monty Python fan as well. An EW operator sitting next to me, playing with his theta scan and all his radars, and everything going 'bee dee beee dee bee' - little knobs and buttons everywhere. At about three o'clock in the morning he looks at me and asks, "Do you listen to Monty Python?"

I looked at him and I said, "Yes. How did you know?"

He says, "Ah! I see your type of humour." He says, "This is the time of the morning when people start to crack," and he simulates pulling out a hand grenade's pin, and he puts it on top of his computer, gets up out of his chair, walks over to the hatch, opens it, climbs out, closes it - both clips. We all sit there watching. He opens both clips, sticks his head in and goes 'Boom!' "You're all dead!" It was fantastic.

You try and make tea. Climb up the stairs, walk along the passage to the galley, open the galley door, make your tea, now you've got to come back with this massive jug of tea for the whole Ops. Room. Down the passage, climbing up the side of the wall, on the floor. It's incredible. It's great fun.

Warrant Broom: He just moans non-stop. Shit! I laugh at that guy. I go to him, and I say, "Warrant, what boat are we on today?" because they had stuffed us around so much we never knew where we were.

He says to me, "Oh bloody hell mumble mumble. I dunno. Just go ashore." Today I said to him; "What must I do today, Warrant?" We had pulled into harbour and my boat had gone out for two weeks. "What must I do?"

He says, "Mumble. Well, just keep a low profile, and at twelve o'clock just secure and go ashore." He says, "I'll cover up for you."

"Where will you be, Warrant?"

"Oh, I'll be ashore."

"How are you going to cover up for me."

"Oh! Mumble. Tomorrow morning." He's a very good chap.

(*Editor: Brian visited an outdoor clothing shop with me, and bought himself a para-military looking set of clothes which he took with him back to the Naval base. Probably with some mischievous intent, he wore these clothes around the base one day, to be challenged by a nervous new sentry. He produced his Identity card, showing him to be 'Special Forces', which made*

the sentry even more nervous, and the sentry allowed him to pass without further inquiry.)

PARATUS December 1990, p. 8 - 9: Strike Craft - Oswald Pirow

PARATUS January 1991, p. 38: Strike Craft - Frans Erasmus (Bit)

PARATUS June 1991, p. 4 - 5 Navy Role incl. Strike Craft

PARATUS March 1990, p. 34: The Marines - Bryan Cunningham - Last of the marines - - Would Bryan Cunningham have been one of these - was he a junior leader?

Operation *Argon*

I remember in the middle of 1985 we were really locked in a war with Angola at that stage, denying all the time that we were actually involved in Angola to the United Nations, although we were involved in a big war there, and we were still involved with Mozambique as well. I had just been promoted to Leading Seaman, and I got the signal which said, in layman's terms; `You are to proceed to Walvis Bay where you are to load up some reconnaissance troops from Recce battalion and you are then to proceed to Angola where you are to await further instructions'. I knew that this was the first operational trip that I was going on. Of course all your mates know that you get these top secret signals, and they say to you; `What was that? Why did you go in and lock the radio room door? What was the signal?' You say; `I'm sorry. I can't tell you.' I would go to the captain, and the captain would say; `Yeoman, you know you're not allowed to tell anyone,' and I would to say; `Yes, sir. I known.' He'd say; `Okay, no, fine! Prepare yourself and tell everyone on the ship that everybody's on eight hours standby.' You would say to the guy on the brow of the ship who announces things over microphones, and he says; "Please note, crew, everybody is on eight hours stand by as of today." That basically means that you're not allowed to leave a 25 km radius of the Durban harbour, and if you do, you have to leave a telephone number where you can be contacted and you must make sure that you can get back within eight hours to go off on an operational trip. Nobody is ever informed of an operational trip. The captain knows about it, I know about it. I know when we're leaving. The Captain knows when we're leaving. We've been told you will set sail at 18H00 on Tuesday evening, or whatever, and let's say this is Sunday. Nobody knows.

On the Monday the Captain would say to everybody; `Bring enough kit for a week. You are not allowed to tell your wives - if you're married. You just tell your wives; "I've been told to bring enough kit for a week. Quite possibly we're going on an operational trip. I don't know when I'll see you again." Which in those days couldn't be a very nice thing for a wife to be told. My husband's off to Angola, I don't know if he's coming back alive, or if he's ever coming back, or when he'll be back. On the Monday at work the captain says; `All leave is cancelled. Everybody will stay on board tonight.' There's a frenzy and a frantic rushing around. Everybody rushes to the nearest telephone to phone the wife and say; `Listen. I've been told that leave's been cancelled. We're definitely going on a trip. We don't know when were leaving.' The next day the captain will say; `Right. No further contact with

any relatives. We are setting sail tonight at 18H00. Quartermaster, make sure that you bring on enough provisions for at least two weeks. Load on everything that you need to load on. Make sure that guns bays are properly stocked. Make sure that the armoury is properly stocked.' There's this frantic rush the whole day to get everything in readiness for sailing. Then the time comes and you leave, and everyone is wondering; `Where are we going? What are we doing?' The captain has given no orders except to set sail, and he gives you a course of where you are off to. Then, of course, everybody knows that I know. I would constantly get these looks, and have people coming up to me and saying; `So. Can you tell us yet?' or `Is it Angola?' Is it Mozambique? What is it? Tell us.' `I can't!'

We set sail and we went off to Walvis Bay, which is a trip of about six days; from Durban it takes three days to Cape Town, and three days up to Walvis Bay. You arrive at Walvis Bay and most people knew that this was the kick-off point from where you would go on an operation up to Angola. We spent about a week up in Walvis Bay. Again, there was no news from anybody. Everybody was having a fat party, and every night they were going out and getting pissed out of their minds in Walvis Bay; `Well I might as well get drunk and have a good time because tomorrow I could be dead.'

Then another signal came through which again I got, which says; `You are to go to Langebaanweg where the Reconnaissance base is, and to collect six people from the reconnaissance unit.' You tell The captain, and he says; `Right. Everybody prepare to set sail tomorrow.' Everybody is confused; `Why the hell are heading back to Cape Town?' Personally, I think that the navy thought that there might be spies within the navy. There was Dieter Gerhardt that was a spy, but they thought that there might be people within the ship's company, so they would say to you; `Go to Walvis Bay'. Everybody would think; `Okay. We're going to Angola.' Then they would say; `Go back to Cape Town' or `Go back to Langebaanweg to fetch these people,' and everybody would think; `Now we're going back. Oh, well. We're probably not going on an operation.' They were trying to cover their tracks.

We went back to Langebaanweg and collected these blokes. We actually took on rails - like train rails on the back of the Strike Craft which were fitted with hydraulics, and these rails could be lowered down over the back of the Strike Craft into the sea, and we took on very powerful motorboats, which would ride up the ramp on to the rail, and then they would be hoisted up on to the ship. We took onboard six reconnaissance people; two of them were black Mozambicans, who spoke mostly Portuguese, who had been converted from Frelemo or one of those terrorist groups to the South African reconnaissance troops, and the other four were white people who were long haired hippy-looking types who basically didn't have any uniform markings whatsoever and carried Makarov pistols and AK47 rifles. One of them was identified and introduced as Captain Wynand Du Toit. We were onboard the SAS Jim Fouche, which was Boat 4, which I am sure the navy would recognise as having been the vehicle that transported Captain Wynand Du Toit. I was given the signal again to give to the captain that we were to go up to Angola and to proceed with Operation [Whatever]. I was given the details of the operation, I gave it to the captain, and then we went to Saldanha. While we were there, every evening we would set sail and go 20 or 30 km out to sea where there

was no other shipping around, and we would practise dropping off and picking up these reconnaissance troops in their motorboats. It was quite a risky business. I remember being the communications operator on the quarter-deck which was right at the back where these boats were lowered into the water. Basically what happened was that you would be steaming along and the captain would slow down from about 20 knots to about 15 knots, which is still quite a steady pace - 15 knots is about 35 km per hour, which is quite fast at sea. You would then lower the rails down into the water with the speedboats positioned on top of them, with the reconnaissance troops; three in each boat. Then there would be some or other mechanism; the boats were linked on to a winch on to the front of the motorboat, and the winch was started and they slowly rolled backwards until they hit the water, and they were being towed behind the ship and then the winch was released. One of the reconnaissance people would actually crawl forward over the front end of the motorboat and lean forward and unhook the hook that was attached to the ship. Then they would speed off into the darkness, and we wouldn't know what had happened to them. Then, ten or fifteen minutes later they would come along next to the side of the ship, and we would have to lower a strop over the side with this hook on it, so that it was slack, and then they would hook it on to the front of their motorboat, and slowly but surely let themselves go back to the back of the ship and fall in behind the ship until this line was taught, and then we would hydraulically pull them back on to these rails again and on to the back of the Strike Craft. We were practising this, obviously because this was what was going to happen when we arrived in Angola. They were going to be let off this way and sent in to do whatever they had had to do. Once we had done the training, and we got the orders to sail for Angola. We sailed, and all markings were removed from the ship. The name of the ship was removed. Any South African flags were removed, any navy ensigns were removed. All rank was removed from all officers, all NCOs. Most people were told; `If you have any civilian clothing on board, wear your jeans and tackies and your T-shirt. Don't wear any navy uniform whatsoever.'

When we got up to where we were supposed to be, which is pretty near up to the Tropic of Capricorn. It was very hot up there. I remember them saying that the sea water temperature was 26°C. The air temperature was 40°C. In the engine room, the guys who were working in there were working in 15 minute shifts because it was 55° in the engine room and they would pass out from the heat.

Again we had to wait until the signal was given, and one night we went in close to Lobito harbour. We were about 5 km off the harbour - in fact we could see the lights of the city. From there we were told to off-load the reconnaissance troops off the back of the ship. Then we set sail at full speed away from the harbour back into the open ocean. We were at sea state one, which is the emergency state, where everybody has to constantly stay at their posts. Usually you have different watches while you are at sea; for instance you have five communicators, you have three watches where two people do a watch, and another one where one person does a watch, so that you can at least have time off to go and sleep. When you are in combat state one you are constantly at your post, even if it's for 48 or 64 or 72 hours, you sit there for

however long it is. We were at combat state one. I remember lying on the floor in the operations room with my parka type jacket thing which you wore which was like wearing a duvet, lying on my back on the deck sleeping because you had to stay at your post but you could have a nap if you wanted to as long as someone else was manning the radio communications etc. Eventually at about 4 o'clock in the morning the captain said to us; `Okay, we're going in to pick them up.' I remember everybody had to keep dead quiet. There was no radio communications, we had to cut all radio communications, we had to had to cut just about everything. You could hear the engine; it was dead quiet. There wasn't a single noise, and you could hear the engine of the ship going `doef doef doef doef' as we went into Lobito harbour again. We stopped probably ten to fifteen km from the harbour, but you could still see the lights, and we sat and we waited, and we waited - and we waited!

Eventually the captain said to us; `Look, the cut off time is 5.30 am. If they're not here by 5.30 am, we're going.' We sat and we waited and we waited and we waited! Eventually, just before 5.30 am one of the boats came back, and there were two people on board. One was one of the black Mozambicans and another white bloke. They were in a terrible state, and they told us that there had been an ambush, and that we had to get out of there as fast as possible. The captain turned the ship round and he said; `Full speed ahead.' The guys were pretty upset and pretty messed up, and one of them had been shot. He had a flesh wound. It wasn't anything serious. They basically said; `Let's get the hell out of here because the guys are after us!' They didn't know whether they had been followed or whatever. The captain turned the ship around and we sped out of there at full speed, but as we were leaving, and this is the clearest thing in my memory, the sun was busy coming up, it was really early in the morning, 5.30 or quarter to six. The sun was starting to rise over the ocean in an orange glow, and behind us, on the land we saw a huge mushroom of flame. Then we heard this dull thud; `Gwa-doof!' and we saw another mushroom of flame, and heard another `Gwa-doof!' To me that was incredible because I'd never seen any sort of action whatsoever, and I knew that they had blown up something, which was obviously what their mission had been. We only heard afterwards that there was an oil tanker depot there where they had stored all the oil for petrol and petroleum or whatever. They had gone in to blow up this oil tanker depot. They had blown up two of the oil tanks, but while they were laying the charges or whatever, they had been discovered; some of them had been caught, some of them had been shot.

We left without any incident. We were at combat state one almost all the way back to Walvis Bay. We were constantly in fear of the fact that the Angolans had equivalent vessels to our Strike Craft that had equivalent technology on board in warfare and weapons, but they obviously didn't have the equivalent know-how and man-power, so they never followed us. We know for a fact that they had MiG fighters, and we never saw any and never heard any, and we never picked any up on radar. Obviously they had thought that it was a guerrilla band of people, and because our blokes weren't wearing South African insignia, and were using Russian weapons, it must have taken them a couple of days to realise that these were South Africans. By that time we were back in Walvis Bay, and nobody knew anything about it. It was a

very carefully constructed operation and plan. For my part in the operation when our friend was captured, I received the `Pro Patria' medal.♣

I went on a couple of other operations after that. One was to Mozambique; one where we were sitting in Maputo harbour when they had the Nkomati accord, and we were actually fired upon, which was quite a shit feeling. Basically Maputo harbour had nothing except a machine gun post, with an old Browning machine gun at the harbour entrance, and the bloke who was sitting in the machine gun nest with his friends or whatever decided that he was bored and that he was going to have target practice. He didn't know that we were sitting just off the harbour, just a couple of kilometres away. The guy just fired randomly into the air, and we heard thud thud thud thud! on the side of the ship. He had actually hit us, but at a range that was totally ineffective. The captain, of course, had a hernia; `Turn the bloody ship around and full speed ahead. Get out of here.' Of course we all thought it was the end! We thought that we were being hit by some other major vessel that was attacking us, meanwhile it was just this *poepall* [*slang*: areshole] probably having target practice. Afterwards, when we tried to find out what had happened, the Captain found out that they had one machine gun post on the harbour wall. Obviously it was just one of them having target practise. Nobody followed us. Nobody got hold of us. I was on the strike craft that was hit by some stray bullets in Maputo harbour.

The only special forces thing that we were involved with was because we were regularly involved with transporting reconnaissance troops up to the border. We were the most active and the most operative section of the navy. Often the replenishment ships like the SAS Tafelberg would go up, or a submarine would also be in the area. The submarines could get information for us without actually being noticed on the ocean. Once or twice we had to RAS - replenish at sea with the submarine, where they would send up a line for fuel if they had more fuel than we did, or we would send them a line and we could pass fresh water over to them or anything like that. Often when we were on operations up north there were submarines up that way as well.

Operations all went smoothly and nothing ever really went wrong apart from where Du Toit was captured, but he wasn't navy. He had nothing to do with the navy as such. The strike craft were certainly shot up, but mostly in harbour by their own crew. Often we would have a new seaman who had just come on board, and all the seamen that were on duty on the brow had to have a loaded Uzi machine gun. They were supposed to have been taught how to use the thing. One bloke at one time cocked the thing, and fired it into the ship, and shot a couple of holes in the hull of the ship, because he didn't know what he was doing basically. Another time one of the seamen dropped a loaded shell in one of the gun bays, which exploded and killed him and

♣ There are a number of inconsistencies, which appears to be recollections from two separate missions undertaken in Angola by members of the SADF Recconnaissance Commando units. The May 1985 mission where Captain Wynand du Toit was captured was an armed reconnaissance of the enclave of Cabinda, not the port of Lobito, and was not a sabotage mission. They were surprised by Angolan army units soon after landing and in the ensuing fire fight two SADF men were killed, and a badly wounded Capt du Toit was captured.

another person inside the gun bay. On operations, nothing ever went wrong really, that I know of.

[Keeping secrets:] It was quite a thing because, especially if you come from a quiet little town, and you haven't really been subjected to any sort of stressful situation in my life whatsoever, and then suddenly you're put in a situation where you are constantly in `Combat State One'; you can't leave your post, you don't have sleep for days on end; go there, lose a couple of people, see these things exploding, and hightail it out of there; it definitely does. Afterwards, you would like to talk to someone about it, but you can't. I've kept it in for years and years and years. I told Kathleen about it, I told one of two people about it at a braai a couple of years ago, but only after the whole `apartheid regime' was being dismantled. It's a case of if you had gone against the official secrets act ten years ago and told someone about it, you would have been thrown in jail. At the age of twenty one or twenty two, that's the furthest thing from your mind.

We were debriefed after ops., but we were basically just told that were to keep our mouths shut, and not to tell anyone, even family members. You weren't allowed to say where you had been and what you had done, who you'd seen, who you'd lost, who you'd picked up, whatever. Our families didn't know what we were doing. We'd been to sea, but we'd been to see for three weeks. Who knows where we were. Nobody knew that you were in Angola or in Maputo or wherever.

Voyages

We went quite far up the coast. I remember we went up as far as the base of Egypt on time. We travelled around all over, but we weren't allowed to go in anywhere. We could see Africa from the sea, but we couldn't land at any harbour. We weren't welcome anywhere. I remember being off the coast of Zanzibar, Tanzania and quite a few different places, but we never ever went ashore. We could see the land, but we couldn't go ashore, which was quite frustrating because we were going up past Mozambique, past Tanzania, up near the equator, and we suddenly came across a couple of little islands which looked just like the little desert islands that you see the little drawings of - literally there was one that was no more than about a hundred square metres of white sand with a palm tree in the middle of it. It was incredible. `Wow! Check at that. It's a real little desert island!' The shoreline was like that too, it was absolutely white, and with palm trees. It was beautiful. You thought; `Wow! I'd love to go ashore there and see what it is all about, but you couldn't.

Something that we used to do that was quite interesting was, whenever we turfed our rubbish away on the ship, we would use hessian bags that were weighted down with weights. They had the proper weights that they use for barbells, and they would put two 5 kg weights into the hessian bag, and then all the rubbish from the whole week would be emptied in there, and it would be closed up at the top with a chain, and locked with a padlock, and thrown over the side because coke cans made in the Transvaal, anything that was made in South Africa would be traced back to South Africa, and we wanted nobody to know that we had been in the waters there. They did that which was quite interesting to me.

[What if white people had been seen onboard the strike craft when you were travelling anonymously?] They would see a mixture. That might have been why we had so many coloured and Indian people working on the ship. Out of fifty, there would be about twenty white people, and about 15 and 15. A lot of the junior seamen were coloured and Indian.

Routine Shipboard Life

We did drills for different combat states. There was a drill for combat state one, two, three, four, and five. Five was the most relaxed, just cruising. Four was some form of possible enemy presence on the radar or something like that. You had a certain alertness state. Three was slightly more; you were on for four hours and off for eight hours. Combat state two had four-hour watches; four hours off and four hours on. `Combat State One' was were you were all awake and everybody was at their combat positions. Then there were no watches whatsoever.

We would also have regular fire drills. You could be in the middle of the ocean in Sea State Five, which is basically a swell of twenty foot, or something, and you would be bouncing around all over the place, and suddenly you would hear over the intercom; `Fire! Fire! Fire in the forward mess!' and everybody had their specific station; one person knew that he had to put on the fire fighting suit, another person would attach a rope to him and hold the rope, another person would be doing the actual carrying of the carbon dioxide tank - which we used to use because of all the electrical fires etc. Everyone had their station. I was on communications on the bridge; someone else was on communications wherever the fire was, and he would relay information immediately to me, straight to the captain who was stranding right next to me, telling him what was happening and what they were doing to put out the fire. It was all pre-planned and everything was worked out according to a very set routine. You couldn't take chances; you were playing with 50 people's lives all the time.

Nobody carried small arms with them on the ship except the officers. We had an armoury where the small arms were locked up. If there was an emergency situation where we needed to draw small arms, everybody would be issued with them. If there was a situation where you might be boarded, or might have to go ashore on hostile territory. The rest of the time you relied on the ship's weaponry; there were two Browning machine guns on the bridge, there were two Bofors 20mm cannons. There was also the forward gun which was worked by a director; basically above where the captain sits on the bridge, there was a chair-unit that two people could climb into. It had a perspex screen all the way around, and they look into binocular-like things, and they can see what the gun can `see'. They can see the target, and they have controls; whatever way they turn the controls, the whole turret moves, and the whole gun turret moves as well, so wherever they are looking, the gun is moving with them. Then of course we had eight missiles, four missile boxes on each side. The missiles had a range of 32 km , although they hardly ever worked. We often had firings of the missiles; every time they fired a missile it cost about a million rand; most of them were `shurries' (That's almost like the sound that a cracker makes when it's supposed to explode, and instead is goes `shurrr!'). They would either take off in completely the wrong direction and

have to be blown up in the air, or they took off, hit the target, and never exploded. They were real duds. We had a lot of problems with testing the weaponry like that. The guns worked very well - we tested those often. We had an aft gun as well, and they both worked with the director, exactly the same.

[Shore leave:] If you were off duty and there was nothing to do and nowhere to go, a group of the boys would go out together and get drunk, and come back together falling all over the place, and then fall down and go to sleep in the ship, ready for the next day. If you were on duty, you stayed onboard and fished, which was usually quite a lot of fun. Fishing over the side of the ship into the sea. We always enjoyed the phosphorous in the water at Walvis Bay. There was such a huge amount of phosphorous that you could come back from a night out and stand and have a leak into the sea, and where it landed, the water displayed in all these different colours because of the phosphorous. One of the favourite things of the navy guys was you had an onboard television system, that was like cable TV basically, between all the different messes. There was a video machine installed in the upper mid section of the ship near the radio room, and certain members of the crew, especially during the `apartheid era', when it was all banned, had blue movies which they took with, and the moment that the ship was out at sea, they would take some normal videos with them as well, and they would say; `A video will now be shown,' when we were all off duty, and you would be lying in your bunk, with a television set up there in front of you, and this blue movie would come on, or sometimes it was a normal movie. If you'd been at sea for three weeks and you had about ten movies with you, you ended up seeing the same movie about five times. It got a bit boring eventually because once you were about 300 km out at sea, you couldn't pick up SABC TV anymore. It was mostly the officers who supplied the blue movies.

Crew

Your average seaman who manned the Strike Craft were national servicemen who weren't at all interested. Your top positions on a strike craft were taken by permanent force personnel. Obviously all of the officers and most of the top NCOs, and of a crew of fifty you had maybe twenty that were just seamen, that were just there to do the menial tasks that seamen do. They were all national service type people, who weren't interested, and didn't give a stuff about the navy. Things happened. Plates that were supposed to be washed were thrown over the side into the sea. Any task that was given to them that was a little bit too much; `Take that 6 gallon drum over there and chip all the paint off and repaint it.' The six gallon drum would somehow disappear and never be seen again. Nobody really volunteered to be on the strike craft. The people who did volunteer were the crazy few who wanted to be on ships.

[Living on top of each other:] Not many people cracked up because we had all been through the training. When you're ashore you spend most of your time on the ship as well, and you know what's going on. You've been trained to handle it. The time when you start cracking up is when you've been at sea for two weeks, and your fresh water supply is running low because you've only got one tank of fresh water on the back of the ship, and eventually they

say; `No more showers. You can only use the water for brushing your teeth and drinking, and washing your face.' When that runs out, they have a desalination process that they use, but you can't drink the water. It tastes terrible. They keep the reserve tank of fresh water for drinking water only. You get dirty, your hair gets dirty, you can't wash your hair. Your fingernails get dirty, and you can't really get the dirt out of you. You've only got two or three sets of clothing with you; you're constantly living in the same clothes, so your clothes become dirty and smelly. Eventually you get so used to it that when you arrive ashore, after you've been at sea for three weeks, and they open the hatches, the people who have come to meet the ship all (screw their faces up at the smell) but you look at them thinking; `What the hell's wrong with you?' Everyone has lived together and you don't smell each other. The submarines are the worst because they are completely closed, whereas we still had fresh air coming in, although the strike craft is still pretty much sealed. You really only have fresh air coming in from the bridge at the top, which is an open bridge, but all the other hatches are closed.

It does get difficult. There are tempers that flare up, but you've got to sort it out because you can't stay enemies with people that you've got to stay at sea with for three weeks at a time. I never had a problem because I spent all my time being sea-sick. I never had a problem with anybody. They could moan at me, and shout at me and scream at me, and I would just get sick. When we went to sea for three weeks once I lost 7 kgs in weight. All I could do was drink water and eat ice-cream. There were things that you knew you could eat, that you knew wouldn't taste too bad coming up the other way. They had excellent food; they would give you steaks and eggs, but you couldn't eat it if you were seasick. It was terrible.

There weren't too many clashes. I don't remember too many. There were very, very few racial clashes. If anything, it was Indians fighting with Indians, or white guys fighting with white guys. We all slept in the same cabins; you might have an Indian guy above you or below you, or a coloured. There were no problems there.

We were there in the early 1980's and at that time there was still a great deal of racial tension in South Africa. On the ships we were very integrated. We never had black people on the ships; we only had Indians and coloured and whites. We all got along famously; there was no difference between us whatsoever. We used to go to the Indian people's homes and to their parties, eat their curry and they would come around to ours for a braai or whatever. We socialised together and there was no problem whatsoever.

The crews generally stuck together most of the time. When you were ashore, you knew each other and chatted to each other, and got to know each other. It was a pretty close community. The crew wouldn't often change. The ship that I was on the longest, I was probably on it for a year and a half, and in about a year and a half there were only about seven or eight crew members that changed. Some bloke got promoted and got a land post, and some other junior bloke came and replaced him, and one or two national servicemen left, and one or two national servicemen came onboard. Generally everybody knew everybody. You knew what to avoid; who you could be friendly with and who you couldn't be friendly with. You just had to get along because you had nowhere to go to get away from it.

Discipline wise, as long as you did your job properly, you would get left alone. The captain was like God, you hardly ever saw him. He spent most of his time in his cabin. When he did appear briefly on the bridge or in the Ops Room, it was only at an important moment, or when he was needed. I have no idea what he did with his time. A lot of the officers spent a lot of their time in the wardroom - they had a very small wardroom, which was about three metres by two metres. All they had in it was a table, with a bunk against the wall, and a bunk against the other wall, and then a little passageway to where there was a little kettle. They would sit and play cards there all day, and the officer of the watch would be on watch, and he would be reporting to the captain. The captain would either be in the wardroom or he would be in his office. We had different microphone systems on the ship. The one was a general PA, and another was a cord that reached just the Ops Room, and there was another cord that reached just the captain's cabin, and you could reach the wardroom, the galley etc. The officer of the watch would be up there and he would grab the one for where the captain was, and say; `Captain, this is the officer of the watch. We have identified the skunk on starboard five zero as a fishing vessel.' He constantly kept the captain updated about what was happening in the sea around us. They called an unidentified vessel a `skunk'. You started with `Alpha', and you went right through the alphabet, so at some time you might have skunks Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, a whole lot all at once and you plotted them all on a map of the sea all around your ship, and once they ad been identified, they were no longer `skunk', - I can't remember what they called them. They had another name for them, a more friendly name than a `skunk'!

Generally on the strike craft most of the captains were either a lieutenant commander or a commander; there weren't many that were captains. Usually, once they had been promoted to captain, they would become the captain of the whole base of SAS Scorpion. In fact, what was quite interesting was, when I was on strike craft, the first ship that I was on, I think it was the Cobie Coetzee, the captain of my ship was Commander Simpson-Anderson. He later became Captain Simpson-Anderson, and was in charge of the whole SAS Scorpion Naval Base, thereafter he became Commodore Simpson-Anderson, and was posted to some big shot head office in Pretoria, and I don't know currently, but in 1995, he was the Chief of the Navy. He was Admiral Simpson-Anderson.

There were one or two junior officers who were a bit of a pain in the butt, and gave some of the more senior NCO's a hard time. The NCOs thought that they had been in the navy long enough, and they knew more than the young officer, and the young officer would come along and say; `Stuff you. I'm an officer. You're supposed to respect me.' So he would try and give the NCO a hard time, and in return the NCO would go around behind his back telling everyone what an arsehole he was.

There was one chap who was a sub-lieutenant when I was on the ship. I remember his first name was Brian, because I used to call him by his first name. He used to say to me; `Don't call me "Lieutenant". Just call me Brian.' We were about the same age; he was also about twenty-two. Interestingly enough a navy strike craft docked at the harbour here in Post Elizabeth in 1996 and they came to play golf at our club. Lieutenant Commander Brian

was the captain of the ship. I can't remember his surname. I said; `Howzit, Brian.' He said; `Gees, BRIAN. I haven't seen you for a long time.'

What I do recall that was quite interesting was when I was at Strike Craft in Durban, having played golf for the navy, I was selected along with another chap who is now a professional player on the circuit, Paul Camps, who is actually a friend of mine, and he's a professional golfer that you see on TV regularly, to go and represent the Navy at the South African Defence Force Championships in Cape Town. So we were told to go and organise ourselves on to an Air Force Flossie, and this we did. We got all our kit together and everything whenever it was, a week later, and got into our cars and drove to the Air Force base in Durban, arrived and were told that unfortunately they had only booked two seats on the plane, and there were four of us going. It was not decided according the fact that I was a four handicap golfer, Paul Camps was a two handicap golfer, Lieutenant Whoever-he-was was a ten handicap golfer, and Lieutenant-Commander Whoever-he-was was a fifteen handicap golfer; let's send Camps and Wingfield to represent the Navy. Oh, no! Officers have to go on the plane and you must find your own way to Cape Town. The result was that we never went, and we didn't play in the South African Defence Force championships. That sort of mentality was the kind of thing that made people leave Permanent Force.

Leaving The Navy

I had wanted to get out from the beginning. I knew that I was there for four years. I was one of what they called the `four-year wonder boys'. I knew that after four years I was getting out. As soon as I got to the stage where I had six months to go I was counting down the days, because I knew that I was going to get out. You have to take a month's discharge leave a month before you leave, so I took a month's discharge leave in November 1985, and went back to work at the beginning of December. I worked the whole of December and finished up on about the 28th of December 1985.

I was called into the base captain's office and he wanted to know why I was leaving, and I told him; `Basically because I'm a chronic sea-sickness case. I have asked to be posted back to the land and nobody wants to post me back to the land. Everybody wants me on the ships.' I said; `As far as I can see there's no future for me with a career in the navy, because I'm never going to enjoy being on ships. If I do get onto the land, it's only going to be for a few months and then they're going to send me back to ships again, so I've decided that's it! I'm not interested in a career in the navy. I'm out.' They didn't argue with it.

The technical term of `buying yourself out' is a term still used in the navy, but basically the amount that you have to pay to get out if so minimal that it's actually silly. In the old days it was used to actually dissuade people from leaving the navy, where, for instance, you would earn £10 per month as a seaman, you would have to pay £50 to buy yourself out. In my case, when I left the navy, I was earning in the region of R 2000 a month, and I had to pay R 350 to buy myself out. It wasn't really anything special.

You had to go and fill in a discharge leave form saying that you were intending to leave the navy at the end of the four years. They then gave you a date which they said would be your date of discharge, which in my case was

about the 28th of December. You go on discharge leave after you've filled in the form, and then you have to serve your last month. Then, on your last day, all you do is, like you normally check in to a place, you check out. You go to each place and get them to sign that you don't owe them any money or any bedding or any clothing or whatever, and then you walk this very nostalgic walk to your car that's packed full of everything. You don't look back. You get in your car and you drive out, and you don't look back. As you go through the gate you shed a tear, and you think; `Four years of my life wasted!' That's how I felt then.

I don't see it was a waste now. I see it as a very good experience, now! But I must admit that if I had the choice to go through it again, I wouldn't because the navy did affect me in a detrimental way to an extent. For at least five years after I left the navy I couldn't sleep properly because I used to think that I was waking up to go on watch in the middle of the night. I had dreams about blowing up places; just things that affected you. Things that did happen that you remembered and things that didn't happen that could have happened, situations that you could have been in; you wake up in the middle of the night and your ship is on fire, and you're burning to death or something, things like that. I didn't have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; nothing quite as bad as that, but it did affect me. I remember for quite a long time afterwards also being very lost and without direction in my life. I'm just so glad to be out of there, that I used to piss it up every night and have a fat party, and I didn't know where I was really going. That was in about the next two years after leaving the navy.

Camps

I was very lucky. When I *klaared* out, I was given the instruction that I had to go and do camps at SAS Scorpion in Durban. On my arrival in Port Elizabeth, I had been working for about two months when I received a notification from SAS Scorpion saying; `You are liable for twelve camps. We will shortly be sending you a call up again for you to come and do camps,' which I thought was basically just sour grapes. Knowing that I had left PF they wanted to call me up within the first six months of me having left. I first phoned SAS Donkin, the navy base, and I said to them; `I am area bound. I run my own business. I don't have anybody that I can employ in my place. What am I to do about camps?" They said; `Oh, well, you can come and do your camps here at SAS Donkin.' `What are you saying to me? I have to come there for two or three weeks, and then who runs my business?' `Oh, well, you can't do that. Then you must apply to the PE Commando to be declared `area bound' and become a member of the PE Commando, which I then did.

Luckily for me, the 2IC at PE Commando was one of my golf members. He was a major or something or other. He said; `Oh, fine. We can do this.' He got me on to the computer, and the next thing I knew I got a letter from the navy saying `You are now the property of the PE Commando. We want nothing further to do with you. You are now liable for twelve twenty-one day camps with the PE Commando.' The PE Commando then wrote me a letter saying `We will call you up for seven one-day camps throughout the year.' In other words; `Seven times a year you must come on a day that we will tell you when, usually a Monday, though to do road blocks and whatever. I got called

up for my first one day camp. I went down to PE Commando. I had navy uniform, and nothing else. The guy said to me; `What are you doing here?' I told him, and he told me; `You are now a corporal. We have you down as Corporal Wingfield. You have to get a uniform. You can't walk around in those blue things.' I was issued with an army uniform and an army beret and army badge and all sorts of things, corporal's stripes and brown boots, the works! Then they said to me; `Okay, fine. Now you can go home.'

I said; `Oh, I thought I was here for a camp for the day?'

They said; `That was your camp. You got all the stuff. You can go. Goodbye.' So off I went home.

The next thing I knew was when we had the riots here in Port Elizabeth in 1988 in the northern areas. The people were rioting and burning tyres in the road. I can't remember what it was all about. Basically, they called up all the blokes in PE Commando to come and do a seven-day camp. I hadn't been touched at all until then. I never did anything. I went down to the Commando in my uniform, the whole works, and I sat around and sat around. Nobody seemed to know what was going on. There was a group of a couple of hundred guys just sitting around. Then I saw this bloke from the club who was the 2IC, and I went up to him and said; `Major, could you tell me what's going on?'

He said to me; `What are you doing here?'

I said to him; `Well, I've been called up.'

`But what about your golf shop?'

`What do you mean?'

`This is a seven-day camp. We've got to go into the northern areas and sort out the riots and stuff.'

I said; `I don't know. I've just been called up.'

He said; `Okay. Come with me. He took me into the building and he sat down in front of the computer, and he tick-ticked around on the computer, and he brought up my name. He said; `Who phoned you?'

I said; `I don't know. Somebody just phoned me, and asked if it was me, asked my force number. I gave him my force number, and he told me; "Okay. You are called up."'

He said; `Fine. Don't worry about it.' Next to my name there was a thing saying `contacted'. He deleted this, and added; `Unable to contact. Out of town.' He said; `Goodbye!' I walked out, and I got in my car, and I went home.

About two years after that, in about 1990 or 1991, everything was starting to be disbanded; national service, the whole works. I got a letter from them saying; `You are a member of the PE Commando. We are just sending you this friendly letter to ask you whether you would still like to be a member of the PE Commando, or be put on to the reserve list?'

I wrote back and said; `Of course I'd like to be put on to the bloody reserve list.' I haven't heard a word from them since. In the last five or six years I've heard nothing from them. I've thrown my uniform away.

On Reflection

If I had been a national serviceman called up to the navy, I wouldn't have had as many choices as I had about what direction I wanted to follow.

Basically, the national service guys - 85% of the national service intake went straight into the Marines; there had no choice about where they wanted to go, and only a mere 15% would end up on the ships. None of them were basically based on the land bases. The permanent force guys were given preference over the land bases, especially those with families and children etc. Permanent Force young unattached guys were the ones who went to ships, and of course there were certain permanent force people who had made a career out of becoming like an executive officer or whatever, and he'd have to be on a ship. You didn't have much say if you were national service.

Dieter Gerhardt

I was in the navy in Simonstown when he was arrested. I remember the big to-do about it all, and I remember them lowering the commodore's flag, because any naval base that had a commodore, which is quite high up, a commodore is equal to a brigadier, and base that has a commodore or an admiral flies a commodore or admiral's flag. I remember that they always used to fly the commodore's flag, and I always used to ask people; `Why do they fly that?' They used to tell me; `Because we have a commodore here. Commodore Gerhardt who's in charge of the dry-dock.' I remember on the day that he was arrested, the flag was hauled down. It was just something that sticks in your memory, because you know that there is this commodore, and the you hear that scandal, and you walk past and you wonder whether his flag is still flying, and you look and the flag's gone, and you think; `They've obviously taken it down because he's been arrested.'

I think that the Navy's suspicions escalated after catching Dieter Gerhardt and they were suspicious of everybody after that. That's why I was also surprised that I got the top secret clearance so quickly. I never applied for it. We had the general - everybody applied for a confidential clearance when you started out, and that was the only such form that I had ever filled in. They checked out my form for the `confidential' thing, decided that it was good enough to be put in to go to `top secret' and then they must have checked me out again after that because I did find out from one of my ex-girlfriends, Nancy, that someone from National Intelligence had come to see her, and ask her all sorts of questions about me, but she was the only one whose name I'd ever written down on the form who told me that she had been contacted by them.

Chapter Ten

Simon Hare
South African Army Corps of Engineers, 1983 - 1984
Bethlehem – Sector 10 – Operation Askari

My name is Simon Hare and I spent two years in the South African Army, doing my National Service. 1983-1984 Age 18-20. I was called up to 2 Field Engineer Regiment, Bethlehem in the Orange Free State.

I had stated in my preference that I wanted to go in to the army. All my friends told me I was crazy but they were all surfer types who went off to UCT to do psychology, marketing etc. I remember at the time not having a clue as to my future and thinking that if I have to go, then let's go all the way.

My family was fairly military minded with my father a Kommando (camper) and my grandfather was the Hon. Col. Of The Dukes, an old Cape Town Regiment based in The Castle. I guess he led The Dukes through WWII and was quite a character. My mom's families were Rhodesian farmers and all had served with various Rhodesian units during their war.

I was actually pretty eager to go as I was over high school and all it meant and ready to start my life in any way. In those days no one questioned National Service or what it was. A few kids who had foreign parents would but it was rare.

I was up in Plettenberg Bay with friends going nuts when my parents contacted me to say our call up date had changed, so I hitched back to Cape Town with a friend and reported to Youngsfield where we boarded a train. There was lots of shouting and confusion. I was in a compartment with six other guys, one which was smoking pot constantly and was freaking us out as we had heard all about the crazy Afrikaner 'Korporals' and we thought any second we would all be in major trouble. Of course we found out later these guys were nothing to what was waiting for us.

We arrived early a.m. in Bethlehem (I had to find it on a map) and were given haircuts, jabbed, prodded and graded. Then lots of equipment in a *trommel* and *'balsak'* and then trucked to a *buite basis* outside of Bethlehem. The area is actually very pretty and close to the scenic Golden Gate area. My base was called Piet se Gat?

The bungalows were rough zinc arrangements, with wind and dust blowing in everywhere. We were sorted out into companies and then it started. Running, yelling, screaming, crawling etc.

Initially I found it difficult as I had barley passed matric and could not speak a word of Afrikaans and would be left standing by myself on the parade ground as my *'maatjies'* tore off around a distant tree. Leaving me to the mercy of three or four enraged korporals, calling me a *soutpiel kommunis* and bringing my mother into it. It is amazing how quickly you can pick up a language when you have to. At the end of the two years, I was fluent in the language even dreaming in Afrikaans.

In basics we basically learned how to be soldiers, drill, shoot, move and all the other skills. I was in with a couple of top English guys and we pretty much laughed our way through it. I was a little shocked by the animosity of the Afrikaner boys to us *souties*. I know we joked about the 'boere' and rock spiders, but this went way back to the Boer War. They really didn't like us but we did all get along eventually as you have to, to get through it.

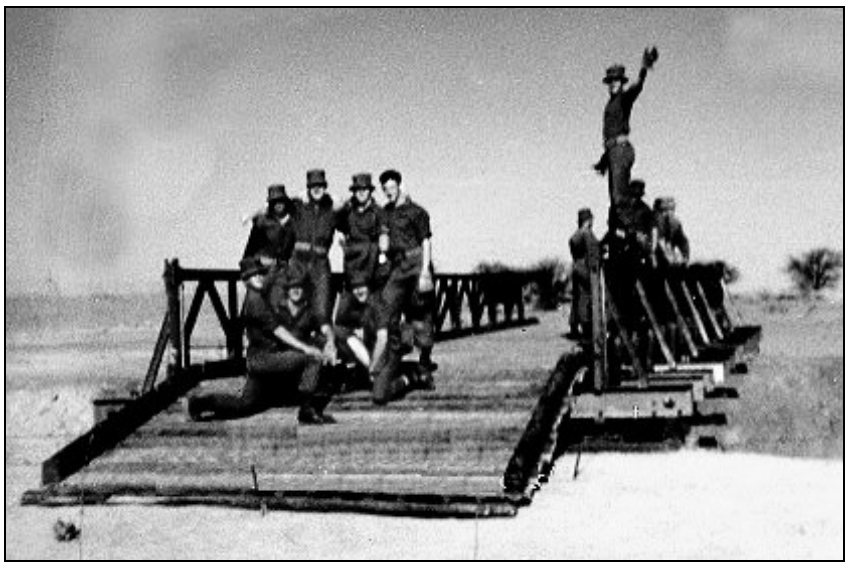
In the valley of "Piet se Gat", Bethlehem, during basics. From left to right are ?, Neil Prinsloo, Chris Griffith, ?, Guy Musson and Simon Hare.

The engineers send a bunch of troops each year to Bloem, to do the Bats course and become Genie Bats, who are The Shit, and we all wanted our wings like crazy. When our Loot told us they were sending us to The School of Engineers, Kroonstad to do a leader course we said: `No thanks! We want to be bats.' He flipped and told us they were just 'meat bombs' and rank was much better to have than wings, but we were adamant. He ordered us to Kroonstad anyway. Thank God.

If basics were high speed, then JL's was low level flying. Junior Leaders course is all about learning to be a leader and at the end, if you are not dropped, you either become a NCO or a candidate officer. Once again I ended up in a base outside of town, this time called Bossiesspruit. Man, what a hole! About five kilometres outside of Crown Town (Kroonstad). A cluster of bungalows and admin buildings on top of a rolling OFS hill and lots of dust. Our Sergeant Major was a tall lean man and quite a character and I wish I could recall his name. He was known to sneak up on unsuspecting *troepe* on parade and put his cock into their hand when it was supposed to be clenched as a fist while at attention.

We learned further how to be soldiers, with a touch of lunacy thrown in as our CO was a Major who was awaiting court marshal for throwing people out of a helicopter on the border (so went the rumor).

There were a lot of guys with some hefty Engineering degrees in with us and some were quite a bit older. Most went on to become Loots. We found out how lucky we were to be engineers compared with infantry as we had 13 different courses to master whereas the bokkoppe had 2, running with a rifle and running with a rifle.



Building a World War Two era Bailey Bridge at Kroonstad, during JL Course.

After JL's the Officer Candidates went to Vegkop, a base closer to Kroonstad. The next phase was very interesting as we learned (I hope I can remember), two kinds of bridge building, fortifications, water purifying, river boats and floating bridges, demolit ions (a personal favorite), hydraulic tools and a few more that I cannot recall.

One amazing thing we learned was how to blow a crater into which a large house could disappear. It was an interesting and fun time as by now we had all become close and we were allowed to party and we did. Our training was excellent and never once on the border did I ever feel out of my depth.

During this time we were sent to Maryvale Springs to be instructors for the July intake. It was good experience and we got to yell and scream at the new troops and be real cunts. I did not enjoy the experience too much and soon after started requesting a border posting.

The Sappers at Maryvale were the ditch diggers and cement mixers. A Standard 8 certificate was considered gifted and some guys even got sent home as untrainable. We got an *opvok* while there, as a sapper rubbed his chin raw with a stone when he was unshaven on parade and was told to shave with an 'electric razor stone' as a joke and then left alone too long.

BORDER

Around the end of November we were building a water point on the Kroonstad river when a dispatch rider appeared with orders for myself and another to report to the Major. About 10 of us lined up outside the Maj's office and were shitting ourselves, as it was like waiting for God to see us. We all filed in and he handed out our 2nd stripe and then said *" Here, julle gaan grens toe"* ["Gents, you are going to the Border."] and then spent the next 40 min on his hands and knees crawling around under his desk sharing with us his bunker clearing wisdom? We got a week's pass and then we were picked up by a C130 transport from a local airbase along with our sappers.

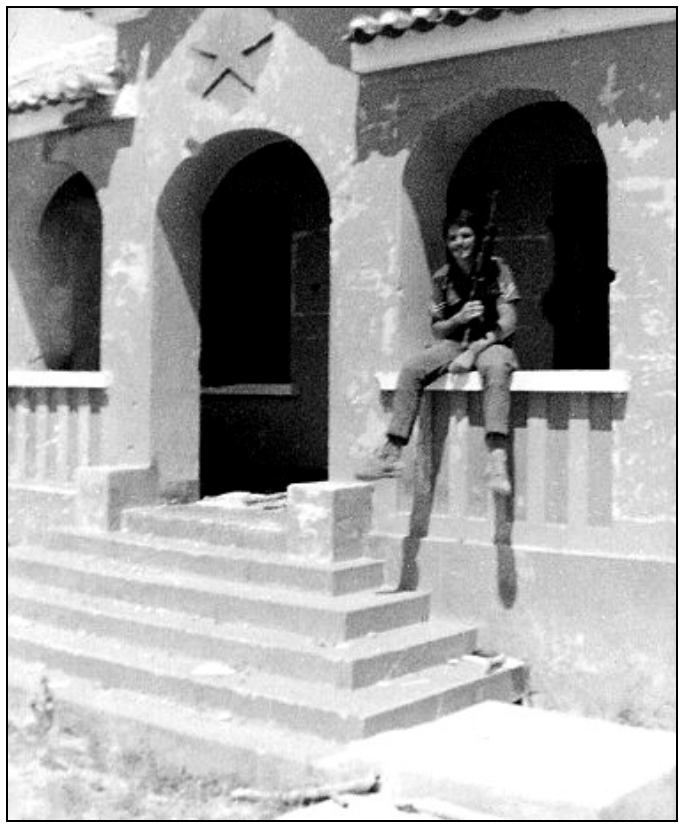
Five hours later we landed at Ondangwa in the heat that hit you with a physical blow. I actually thought we were standing in the airplane exhaust. We were all then loaded on to Kwevoels and trucked to Oshakati and 25 Field Engineer Squadron.

Following two weeks of re-training (told to forget everything we had learned in "The States") myself and another corporal along with 25 sappers and the tools of our trade joined a heavy armored column from 10 Panzer and headed North up to Xangongo for Operation Askari. We then waited a period at Xangongo while the other combat groups assembled. One of our Buffels engines died in the bush and the Tiffies changed it out for a new one overnight. Amazing! We had to constantly camouflage our vehicles as there were MiGs stooging around.

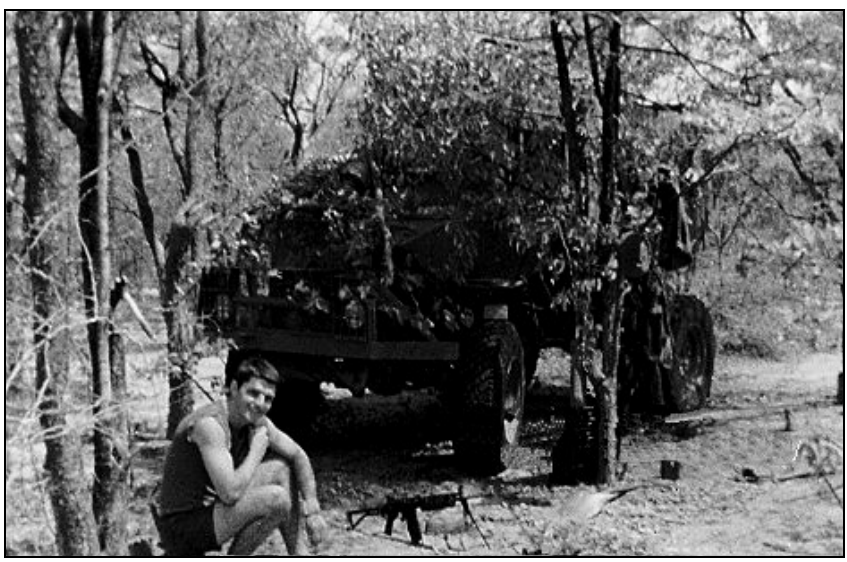
Again we headed north, this time through the bush with the Engineers in front. I remember being on foot in front of this very large column with a compass threading a route through the thick bush all the while thinking "Don't screw it up and get lost". Bundu Bashing was fun for all of five minutes when you realize that everything that is in the tree that you are knocking over is flicked back and down into the back of the Buffel. Everything from dead sticks, scorpions, wasp/ant nests snakes …you name it. We even had the engine catch on fire from all the dry sticks and leaves building up on the manifold. We then spent some time around the small town of Quiteve which the FAPLA's had left as soon we started shelling them. It must have been really nice once on the banks of a beautiful river.

Our next task was to keep the FAPLA troops in the town of Mulondo busy while the drama continued elsewhere. We would circle the town a few miles out. The artillery would set up and then rev the town. It was very exciting as they would fire back with 120mm mortars and artillery. Most of the time they didn't know exactly where we were. Later a Special Forces soldier of theirs was shadowing us on a bicycle with a radio. The fire became much more accurate. One day while we where being shelled and I was laying up against a large Baobab tree next to a Recce, he told me how you can tell when the shells are coming close or not by the difference in the sound. Right!

One day we watched as the Airforce Impalas were revving the town with rockets and you could see the flack around them even though they were shooting from a high altitude. A SAM followed the one Imp and exploded near the tail. We were listening on the radio and told the pilot that we would throw smoke if he wanted to bale, but he wasn't interested and made it back to Ondangs.



A relaxed Simon Hare resting on the porch of a former FAPLA Headquarters in southern Angola, during Operation Askari.



Buffel camouflaged against MiGs near Xangongo, while having a brew.

The early morning team sweeping the roads for mines. A familiar sight for Sappers.

Sunday afternoon sports – letting rip with a MAG LMG.

This went on for weeks and we finally returned to Oshakati after two months living in the bush. We were filthy.

I then spent the rest of the year with various other units along with a detachment of sappers. It was very interesting and all of it spent in Angola. I will never need to go on a safari as a tourist as I sure got my fill of it. We served with the Bushmen, *Reaksie Mag* 101 Bn, 32 Bn, 61 Mech, the Bats and had a wild time with a black regt. from Zululand. Most of these units had ex Rhodesian members from the RLI, RAR and even the Selous Scouts. I think that war was all that they knew.

In the middle of the year (traditionally, a quiet time on the border as it is the dry season) we were sent on a month's leave which was too long really and I got into all sorts of trouble.

Reporting back they sent us to a Lake near Harrismith for retraining. I suspect that the PF's just wanted to keep us busy for a time as we drank, braaied and relaxed. We built a few bridges and played with Zodiac inflatables. It was pretty cool as they did leave us alone. We got real comfy, even making a water heater out of old farm equipment and diesel drums.

On return to the border it was more of the same except when in Oshaks, I trained the campers or blew mines in the area. Sometimes that was pretty gruesome. Often we'd hear the bang and wait for the call. After locating the scene we'd render the area safe (clear of further mines), help survivors and then dig in the crater to find pieces of the base plate to identify the mine. One Sunday afternoon while we were lying by the pool there was a distant boom, and we realized it was another *myne getrap* [mine detonation]. After a delay and the radio hadn't called us, we went in search on the incident. We didn't have far to go, about a km away we found a bunch of PB's milling around on a short dirt road off the tar track. A herd of cows and goats had tripped a double tank mine with a personnel mine on top to set it off. It was a mess with shredded meat everywhere, fortunately no humans. I was in the crater digging out pieces of the base plate to identify the mine when this white farmer rocks up in a VW kombi with his whole family including granny, grandpa and the kids. It turns out the dirt road was his and led to a pigsty that he owned and they were on the way to feed the pigs while returning home, what a close call.

Being in base wasn't such bad time as I was always busy and I would carry a clipboard and walk fast to look busy and fool the PF's.

One adventure I had was to go out to Kaokoland and train some SWA Storm Pioneers as they were screwing up and losing people and body parts. I flew out there with all my *myne* and box of tricks. It is truly a beautiful, desolate place where I spent the next three weeks retraining these fellas. The native people were quite striking and spend their lives covered in a mixture of animal fat and red earth with elaborate beaded hair. The journey home was in a Dakota with no door for air conditioning. We flew over Etosha pan to Grootfontein where I was to catch a `flossie' [Hercules C130] back to Oshaks. Having boarded the `flossie' and loaded all the mines in several boxes I was trying to find a comfy spot for the flight. The engines suddenly were shut down and a pissed-off loadie threw myself and the mines off the aircraft literally at the end of the runway. Some ruling that I was unaware of about mixing explosives and personnel on a transport. The MP's were looking for

me for weeks after that but I made sure I was back in Angola on a small Op with 61 Mech.

Deep in Angola we had to pull out yet again due to politics. The Captain in charge, his Eland armoured car caught on fire with a full load of ammo. This delayed us a day and I had to blow up all the unexploded ordance. It was a mess.

Blowing up surplus Russian mines with PE4.

I once was sent on an odd mission with a bunch of Bats. Our mission was to move some UNITA troops out of one area to another, basically dodging the JMC political monitors; bullshit actually.

The Bats and their Loot were new on the border and were super *Paraat*. As we were loading up, I said to the Loot that we better take a lot more rats as these things always take longer than we 're told. I was sent packing. We set off from I think it was Eenhana and we mine swept pretty for north for several days. Of course on the way my sappers asked if they could grab a goat and some chickens which was usual. All hell was breaking loose in a kraal alongside the road while the boys were taking care of business. The Bat Loot comes speeding up to see what all the drama was and has a fit *"Jy moet beheer oor jou mense."* [You must control your people.] etc and was going to *kla me aan* [charge me] when we got back. Whatever. Of course the whole thing drags on for weeks and by then we are all eating chickens and goats.

We had moved the UNITA's on the back of several kwevoels and it was time to head home. The UNITA base was at the end of a beautiful shallow valley and I wished we could have stayed there longer. We were about to leave when there was a commotion around one of the Buffels, one of the wheel bearings had seized and it was immobile. The poor loot was shitting himself as we were told specifically to leave no trace of us being there. I had a brainwave and suggested that I blow a crater, we could then back a Kwevoel into the hole and we could then push the Buffel onto the back of the Kwe (I was always looking to blow up stuff). It worked out grand and we were on our way. We drove on into the evening, with the Engineers in the first three Buffels. I would keep checking behind to ensure we were being followed. It was already dark and I could not get the Loot on the radio so we stop and there's no one behind us. Most of the sappers were campers and are not impressed, as we were way deep in Angola and all alone. I kind of knew the area and had a hunch that they had taken the wrong turn at a Y in the road a few kms back. I went with a Sapper, cutting trough the bush to try and intercept them. Eventually we heard them and we got quite close and then laydown behind some trees as the Bats tend to shoot first and ask questions later. I shot a pencil flare up and they opened up on us. Eventually things got sorted and we all got home safely to a large temporary base where I hooked up with some fellow engineers and had a beer while taking a bath in a S-tank as the infantry trudged past on there way to pull perimeter guard. It was pretty cool being an engineer.

I went on about six different external Ops that year and couldn't wait to *Klaar out*. Subconsciously (I was too young for real thought) I was desperate to leave Southern Africa. I was quite familiar with Rhodesia and the drama they had. Then seeing Angola up close was also a trip, the PF's were too much and there was **NO** way that I was ever going to do a camp. I was also certain that I had used up all my luck. I took all my army pay and flew to Europe and began another adventure.

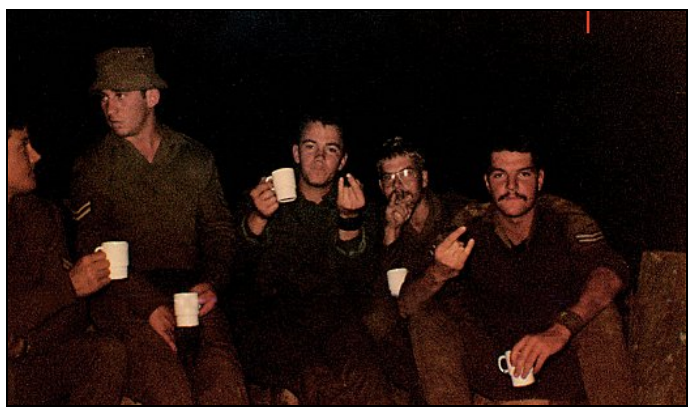
I enjoyed editing and scanning all the old pictures and a self-indulged trip down memory lane. Apologies to any scholars who may read this and have to deal with the grammar and slang but that's how I remembered it. It was an interesting and action packed two years, most of it fond memories although

there were some incidents that I have had to deal with as I've matured but I have buried them and moved on.

My comrades were superb, our training first class and it was an honour to serve with the men of the South African Army Corps of Engineers. Most of the pictures are mine however I lost a couple of rolls to the heat and a flash flood, and one camera just plain broke.

Miami, Florida May 2002

Brennan, Daan du Plessis, Moritz le Roux (a talented driver) and Simon Hare (in front). We were getting rations from Ruacana when an army photographer took our picture.



Min dae Braai - Sonnekus Venter, De Wet, van Deventer and Simon Hare.

Chapter Eleven

Jonathan Buys
5 SA Infantry – 1 Military Hospital – Walvis Bay
1983 - 1988

Jonathan did basic training at 5 SAI starting in July 1983. He joined the Permanent Force and trained as a nurse at 1 Military Hospital, where he qualified in December 86, after which he was commissioned, and sent to the Walvis Bay Sick Bay where he served until klaaring out at the end of June 1988.

BASICS AT 5 SAI LADYSMITH (1983)

You'd done infantry basics…?

My story of the sharing of the work load was to cut down on the cleaning. We had a Colonels parade, and they wanted us to believe that they were very sticky. Part of the whole thing was to make you rank conscious. The attitude they tried to engender was way out of perspective in military terms, but it was to teach the new boys the hierarchy. The whole bunch of us where just figuring out this little scam at 5 SAI.

I can't remember all the details anymore but - we were up to all kinds of mischief but I think the case was that we weren't shooting in group, rather a case of limited amount of blank shooting during 'fire and movement' training. I think it was more an excuse to make us run, to the shooting range and back. We'd swap rifles to keep as many barrels clean as we could. On several occasions we managed to keep the majority of weapons clean by organised chaos.

We had to leopard crawl half the way there and back, everyday, about two kilometres out and that was a fair bit of leopard crawling. We all had our weapons set in previous shoots and this was just a case of getting it over and done. There was no scoring being done, it was just to take a couple of crates of ammunition and you weren't to bring them back full. Most of the guys were quite happy just loading magazines and letting a few guys who were interested in shooting. The kind of masquerade: Smith stand up - and Jones would stand up, Dippenaar stand up, and Jones would stand up, *'volgende'* (next) stand up, and Jones would stand up. So Jones would shoot a lot. (The names are imagined). But there were a few of us who didn't want to waste time shooting. We kept it up as a group and in the whole platoon we would clean only about five rifles. But had the Corporal noticed he would probably have blown a fuse, but they just weren't interested. Every-time they would let us run five kilometres, getting the exercise over so they could take us back.

Did you choose medics rather than to fight?

My first choice was infantry school but my back ache was getting worse and worse and worse; to the extent that I couldn't take the pain any longer and

insisted on seeing an Orthopaedic Surgeon. I was diagnosed eventually with Scheurmann's disease which is fortunately a regenerative back disorder. I had outgrown my spine, the vertebrae still had to harden. As a result the vertebral bodies had crumbled a bit and had to repair themselves with time. I was in a lot of pain for several months, and I went for physiotherapy and treatment. I started to come right to the extent that I decided to do the nursing course. So, that's the way I started it.

And moving from being National Serviceman to joining PF?

I joined up from 5SAI. I got posted back to 5SAI at the end of physiotherapy, I had been on the Operational Medic course, I did a portion of the Ops course, (Mark Davies did this course too). I've done some of the time in Kalefong, and Tembisa. We'd call it 'knitting', going in to a Casualty Department and literally stitching up 30 to 50 people a night. There were about a dozen medics there, so you're talking of about 300 - 350 people seen in the matter of 4 hours. High patient turn over and they were given relatively good treatment, because we were able to give them time to do proper stitching. The Ops Medics used to come in when they were new straight into repairing the Apache stuff. (Partial scalping)

Within one night I went from heavy handed stitching to fine stitching through to plastic surgery level in about 4 hours. For a while this was night after night, and at that stage and there were times that my platoon was doing nothing particularly the next day. I once joined my friend's platoon as they'd just threw us in the back of a truck and counted how many got out on the far side. As long as the same amount got in they weren't worried whether it was Platoon 1, 2, 3, or 4. Some duty corporal ran the shift.

I did a lot of extra stuff because it was fascinating and it was some way I could make a difference. You know the patients were all non-military. People we were treating were like the businessman on his way home from work, who was stabbed through his car window. That old gentleman possibly got my best stitching ever. Somebody just tried to mug him at the stop street. They stabbed him twice in the arm, once in the lower arm, once in the upper arm. Quite high, just below the shoulder muscle, and then they cut him on the head and that basically tore quite a long gash on his face, quite visible. I saw him as a dignified old African gentleman and when I saw which of the Medics were going to receive him, I suggested it was time to take a smoke break. He would have done an adequate job but he was tired and not particular well disposed to the darker brethren; not that I was a liberal, but I did have a degree of good will and I thought that I could do something for the future. I don't know if he would remember it now, but I remember it.

Is it true that a lot of these white young people helping in hospitals were actually military training for special military tasks?

We always had our special military tasks.

OPS medics?

OPS medics were trained to assist on the sharp side, what we called *"skerpkant"* (Sharp End). They were trained so they could go into action with who ever they had trained with. If they had made muster for Parabats they would support Parabats, if they were originally artillery, mechanised infantry,

armoured core infantry, mounted infantry, navy - they could go with navy guy, They really thought medics was bizarre and out of place, they didn't believe that medics should be separated from the Corps. The Navy believed you should have navy medics, no everyone agreed on this. They sent through according to the numbers needed. Infantry always preferred to have 2 Medics per platoon of 20 people. At least they'd have one medic and occasionally two in operational patrols. Especially the men who were sharp side. It sort of evolved that they had one medic at the base camp and one medic on patrol. So you had basically one man looking after the lives of 20 others because you had 19 men and an officer. And in the whole scheme of things you're medic, your cook and your signalman were very well treated by the others soldiers. Because that's where the comforts will come from. The Medic would look after your blisters at the end of the day so it really helped to look after him in patrols and especially in combat. I never went sharp side so I was lucky. But after being trained as a nursing officer I then got posted out to SWA Med Command.

I never really joined PF. I got light duty for my back and I really was in a bad way but I tried that I could my back just wouldn't keep, even with the light duty. Eventually I requested a posting back to my unit. The Ops Course Major wouldn't allow me to apply for a permanent post while I was light duty, so I requested a posting back to 5SAI and thinking that if that doesn't happen, at least I got a degree of comfort not too far from home. Two and a half hours away from home – Durban.

What happened was that I got back to the camp and I quickly went to find out who was the recruiting officer in the camp, and found it was some staff sergeant with a not particularly high IQ holding this little bit of power. He was NAFI, seriously NAFI. He also had a chip on his shoulder for National Serviceman. He was one of the guys who made National Service feel like a prison sentence. He said it will take six weeks and I would miss the course and you would have to start on the next one. This was about the end of November 1983.

I got posted out to 5SAI. I had my first pass and a few days leave extra because I had had almost no leave up to that stage after five months. I got into the recruiting office in Durban and I did all the initial stuff and then I got back, I didn't do all I needed to do and I had to think a bit for that decision.

At that stage I decided I would do the course, so I phoned my dad and he took the papers in and walked them through all the way. I got back to 5SAI camp and I waited for the interviews. I had to get myself to Pretoria for the preliminary interviews, had the interviews under 'false pretences' (operating outside the military route) as I had been sent up for medical purposes. I then kind of went AWOL; I went into Pretoria and did these interviews at SAMS HQ, and then caught the train back to Natal. I was called back for the main interview officially, and the self-same staff sergeant who had stood in my way earlier had to give me my rail pass! And it grated him that any national serviceman got anything out of the military system – in his kind's mind it was wrong. I mean the whole attitude of the bulk of PF was that their job there was to make sure that national servicemen got nothing out of the 2 years they had to do and this boy really loathed that this *'Engelsman'* was joining his Organisation.

Your brother was already in PF at that stage, wasn't he, Phillip?

No, my brother came in after me. I was permanent force as of the 1st of January 1984. My brother's intake was in January (the 7th or something) and he joined up at the end of his basics. In fact they mucked the whole bunch of the medical professionals around so their rank came through a few hours after the rank came through for the national serviceman, with the result the young NSM lieut gave the whole bunch of them a hard time.

In the end another officer intervened and resulted in the 5 or so new PF Captains being given their commissions just before the NSM commissioning parade, rather than after which had been the obvious intention of the Lieut over them.

NURSE TRAINING AT 1 MILITARY HOSPITAL

So after qualifying you did a three year course in nursing?

'84, '85 '86. I qualified in December '86.

You were around hospitals all of '87?

I had to wait for my results, as we got our commissions only after receiving our final results. I moved out in May 1987 to Walvis Bay. I was part of a group which where called to see the OC Nursing and congratulated for our commissions. There were about 20 or so out of a class of 33 called in and congratulated and given permission to wear our pips. Of course we all went to stores to draw our insignia on that authority. However there were twelve names that weren't on that list and these guys were still running around as Candidate Officers, who should have been commissioned with us but there had been a mistake in the data of the telegram order. Somebody had goofed at Headquarters, our commission was supposed to be dated for another date and when the problem was realised, they asked us to take off our rank! And I was absolutely incensed by this although they apologised very profusely and they explained us what the error was.

I didn't like this at all, I had already been home, my family had seen me with my rank on. During this brief period when I'm was not allowed to wear my new rank, I wore a plain white CO band as a protest - a piece of paper, stuck over the two pips, so that you could see it. I was reprimanded on one occasion for not wearing the three-band double red stripe, but I obeyed orders, and remained a CO still.

And then you went out to Walvis and you stayed there for…?

Oh, dear old Walvis. I did some special weapons training, unofficially because I had to wait until I was an officer to do it. I was the most junior ranking officer there on account of that. They understood why, and they knew my brother too. I was trained to strip down and reassemble the full range of weaponry that was used up in Namibia. All the Russian, all the Chinese, all the South African, Israeli, European weapons. Because neither side ever used American arms in that war we didn't bother with them. Apparently their tolerance for African dust was the reason no one risked using them. The only thing I didn't have anything to do with the Russian RPG. I decided my favourite weapon at that stage was the Uzi sub-machine gun. I thought it was

the best, although it had its technical faults; if you jarred it hard enough you would cock itself and drop its safety catch. If you had a gun smith who was willing to file a notch in it then the odds was generally that you could get that fixed.

You were trying to do casavac training?

It was just crowded, noisy. Basically you would have to straddle your patient, your knees cramped either side of the stretcher. Badly wounded men being taken out of combat meant if you had to, you would hang from the ceiling of the chopper and did what you have to do.

Do you recall what use that was?

I never went live with it, only practised, mainly simulation in a rebuilt cabin. Much of it was just lectures and discussion. A lot of discussion about how you do this and how you do that. A lot of training about emergency drugs. What you can use and what you can't use, why you shouldn't use something, why you should use this or that. All a bit exhausting.

WALVIS BAY MILITARY AREA SICK BAY

The idea was kind of flattened as I didn't finish the course because somebody in the South West Africa Medical Command pulled strings and got a male nursing officer for their problem unit. The theory was a man would help instil discipline and they looked around and with only about six or eight guys available in the Military fitting their requirements and me going to South West Command anyway… I turned left at the next traffic lights down to the coast. I arrived there and I quickly discovered that this was really a nice place to be.

THE DOCTOR AND THE MICROLITE

I was posted from 1 Military Hospital to Walvis Bay Military Area in 1987, where I was 2-ICC of the Sickbay. One of the National Servicemen doctors posted out there, Dave, brought a Microlight aircraft, which he kept stuffed in his VW Combi camper. He was always in search of a convenient place to take off and to land. He had driven all around to find a good level stretch without any telegraph poles and found such a place right down the road, beyond the salt pans, where there was a good hard road where you could take off and land safely. He accepted that that was going to be as good as it would get, however one night on-call, the Infantry Battalion RSM developed an acute pancreatitis. This is one of those diseases which when inflamed, you can diagnose from foot prints on the ceiling.

Dave knew the very fast acting treatment and within minutes produced relief for the RSM. The news had got about this small town that Dave was looking for a place to land his microlite - so Dave seized the moment of gratitude and asked if he could take off and land on the rugby field - about 40 yards away from where he garaged his Combi. The RSM said without hesitation, "certainly my boy, you can even take off and land on my parade ground!" - as you know, a parade ground is virtually sacred ground to an Army RSM! You don't even walk on a parade ground, you march or you run!

What was the name of the doctor?

Dave. No idea of his surname, we were on first name terms and I was the senior Lieutenant. I had four officers: Doctors David and Johan, a dentist Cobus and Dirk the health inspector. It's a while back.

Other stories about this Dave: his micro-light was a single-seater so it was kind of lonely up there. But he'd came back with stories about what he has seen when he flew over town. Couple of remote beaches where he had flown to see what the surfing was like. Occasionally he would come back with more interesting stories than just surfing.

One particular day he was out, he went out quite far down the coast - and he usually knew what his limits were, however the wind changed and picked up, leaving him in a pickle. The best time he could do was to fly in over the desert where the wind would not be as strong, however when he tried to come back into town, the sea mist had sprung up.

He landed out on the desert road and decided to drive in. He took off his wings, and hid them behind couple of landmark rocks on the roadside, and he drove in on his remaining fuel, on the trike, with the 'fan' blowing up dust like mad! He ran out of juice just as he got to the Rooikop Air Force Base outside Walvis. With much amusement, they filled him up with fuel and he breezed into town. The following morning he went out and collected his wings. It made the local newspaper; everything he did made the local newspaper. It stinted his style a bit.

Was he a National serviceman or a camper?

National Serviceman. He had done his housemanship in South West Africa and had volunteered to be posted back and luckily he got Walvis Bay.

Sharp side?

As far as 'sharp side' or seeing combat; I got nothing of real interest that could be called 'sharp'. At Walvis Bay we where support and training: Infantry Battalion, Artillery training, a small Air Force Base, Navy Base, nothing too exciting, militarily. We would go with the infantry after basic training for 'fire and movement' and assorted live test firing range work. During the time I was there they closed the range down to do a comprehensive mine and 'rouge' ordinance sweep. They'd invite the dignitaries from town to watch the detonation of recovered live ordinance. Periodically all the unexploded shells recovered would be stockpiled in an existing crater, and at some distance from it in sand bunkers, they would detonate it. On some occasions the whole town shook because there is about three metres of sand over bedrock or granite inland around Walvis Bay. The thump would get transferred into town and all the windows would rattle and things would fall off shelves... the town was very indulgent.

It was 2SAI's which had a training camp as well. Would you have any dealings with those guys?

Oh yes, we had a lot of dealings with them. The 2SAI guys: that wasn't exactly a cushy camp, although more because of dust and sand, more than

anything else. National Serviceman were there doing *'diensstraf*' - for being white, I don't know?

The things that you got up to in sick bay - the life and times in the ..

Well I got there in May, I quickly made friends with the guys and the first bunch of them, including my three lance corporals '*klaar*-ed out' in the June.

We were limited to three stripes for the sickbay, they would only give three stripes out and none of the guys were really that calibre to take two or three stripes and as we had three good guys there, each of them had one line.

These were ops medics?

Well no, normal medics. I think one of the guys was an Ops Medic but he had not been send to the border and sat in a office. We had quite a few of the guys transferred in as problem cases. Young guys who were constantly AWOL, in instances where there wasn't domestic reason. We had a couple of guys who had just run foul of the military disciplinary code.

These were all medics?

Medics, all Medical Corps. Assorted NSM drafted into Medics.

We had a rather interesting Colonel out there. He was the military area commander, the senior officer of all the five or six bases we had there. We had Air Force, Navy, Medics, Infantry, Military Police and Artillery Armoured Division. The colonel woke up one morning with Bells Palsy; half his face was sagging. From being a very public person he suddenly disappeared from view entirely. Parade was taken by the 2IC, everything was basically taken over by the 2IC. The commanding officer disappeared. Palsy resolves quite fast if it's treated correctly, I believe. He was coming right quite fast with this thing but he had discovered a bit of a predilection for fishing. He subsequently relinquished most of the function of a commanding officer. He'd head out fishing every day. The Warrant Officer in charge of the kitchens or some other senior NCO or other officer would get roped into coming to assist him with his fishing. We were rather under officered in that senior staff in the camp were a bit thin on the ground for some months. It was great fun. It didn't really effect the functioning of it. Such is the military that they are horrendously over-staffed anyway in peacetime.

A DEATH IN THE DUNES

There was only one tragedy. We had a young guy with a drug problem who couldn't cope with the stress and he shot himself out in the sand dunes during one of the exercises. It wasn't even a live round exercise. He had either stolen or smuggled out a live round. The guys were using the screw in thing that you put into the flash arrester that gives just enough back pressure to re-load your rifle on semi-automatic. They were using their R4 weapons and firing blank ammunition in the exercise, playing war games as part of their training in stalking and ambushing. Everyone was lining up for lunch on that day, and my medic, Mike Burke, (a nice guy - he eventually got two stripes - it was well worth it, but then he nearly duffed it because of a girl) - he had the day shift out there, with the good garry (SWB Landrover).

(We also had a very dicey land rover with a gearbox that would only work in first and fourth - it would work in second and third, but you couldn't change it from second down or up. You could start it off in second, and go everywhere at a fair speed, or you could start in first and get it up to a good high whine and then kick it through to four. You would struggle to start up in third gear. It took a lot of patience with the clutch. These were all options. I learned the first & fourth manoeuvre.) Mike had the good garry out there - the one with all the gears. They always parked it on the hard facing outwards with all the equipment so they could get it where they had to in a hurry.

This young guy went off and his buddies thought he was going off to take a leak or go for a smoke break behind the dune. Everyone heard the gun shot while everyone was supposed to be waiting in line for lunch. Of course all the NCO's responded immediately and got everyone mustered, and some men went off searching. Of course they started doing ID parades - getting the guys into platoons, into sections and counting. They had identified him before he was brought in.

He had put his rifle under his chin and shot his head open through the middle of his brain and slushed one half. It didn't kill him. He was unconscious but he was still breathing. They wrapped him up and Mike Burke did some low flying. They reckoned that you couldn't do that road in more than 35 k per hour. He did it at top speed.

We got the guy in to the Town Casualties, onto a Casevac aircraft that happened to be close enough to detour past us, but he was DOA. They flew him to 1 Mil because 1 Mil was best prepared. It was the same kind of mileage. It was 2000 km to Pretoria and 2000 km to Cape Town from that point. Cape Town would have taken a lot longer from Youngsfield to 2 Mil, than from Waterkloof to 1 Mil.

I didn't actually know the boy. I would have seen him in the camp. We didn't have a particularly large intake. We had just over a thousand. It was one of the smallest intakes they had had. They were busy phasing out 2 SAI. That was the tragedy of it.

We had the occasional motorbike and car accident that left people a bit worse for wear. The occasional battered husband or wife. Never really exciting things happened.

THE GUY WITH THE SOCK IN HIS UNDERPANTS

We had one little guy who was always getting into trouble: A short little lad – *'kleinmannetjie'* . He was the only person I nearly hit in my whole army career. I didn't because he wasn't worth the trouble. I had rank, he didn't have rank. I had a lot to lose. The name Webster comes to mind, but I don't know if that's right. This lad was full of nonsense. He had some relative who was a Colonel somewhere, and so he felt that because of his Uncle being a Colonel, he had some pull in the military, but that serious pull he had in the military didn't stop him from being sent to Walvis Bay.

When we'd call his bluff he said that he chose to be transferred to this place. That wasn't the military way. He gave everyone a hard time. He was like five foot nothing and spoke like he's a big boy. One night he was full of himself, telling stories and bull shit – the other Medics decided that they had

had enough. He had put a sock in his underpants to show off a serious bulge. That night they locked him in his bungalow, in his underpants, complete with sock. Walvis Bay can get quite brisk, about 13 degrees C was our average night temperature. He started making a noise to get back into the bungalow, and was caught by the Infantry guards.

Picture this scrawny little lad Webster getting dragged off, in the cold, but with sock still *in situ*, having kind of forgotten about that issue. The guards, of course, recognised who he was, but they were rather officious about it. The medics were perceived as having a cushy time. The guards dragged this lad in and he was presented in front of the Officer-of-the-Watch, who happened at that stage to be having a cup of coffee with Dirk, one of the medics who was sitting out of line of sight. (Dirk was our health inspector, from Malmesbury in the Cape and he could make amazing *potjiekos*.) Dirk was slouched on an easy chair, out of sight, and the Officer-of-the-Watch, an infantry officer, was having a good rib at this incident.

This young, snotty little medic shivering with the cold in his scants with a sock in place. He was standing there at attention being barked at by an infantry officer and eventually he became aware of the sock, and he began making surreptitious moves to take it out. The infantry officer had attracted a crowd around him by this stage, the guard hut had emptied because they could hear shouting, and they were all peering around the door and listening from outside and laughing. This guy was aware that there was a huge audience and he couldn't turn around and face away from this guy because he was at 'attention'.

He was trying to get this sock out of the way while being they ribbed him about wanting to play with himself. Eventually they had him virtually in tears. He needed to be brought down a notch. Eventually he got the sock out, but I think for quite a while afterwards the name Willie Webster for `willie warmer' was used. All the medics got to hear about this and enjoyed it immensely.

I have a strong mental picture of this lad. He was the only guy in the military that I actually nearly hit. I would have liked to have dealt a couple of *`regmakers'* to several people along the line. The term *`dom astrand'* (Dumb insolence) term in Afrikaans is almost - just short of wilfully arrogant. *`mistant' (astrant)* I guess is `otherwise'. This boy had just the attitude that he was a colonel's nephew, and he could do what he wanted to do because the colonel would get you. This was some arbitrary colonel, probably in the prisons services on the far side of the country, and totally powerless and probably wouldn't have lifted a finger short of for real reason.

Eventually I got him dealt with - sorted out. We had a posting out to the DB. Every morning a medic was sent out to the detention barracks. They would spend the whole morning there and two or three afternoons a week we'll get a Doctor out there. It was quite a comprehensive cover considering that we were so close. We could run there if we had to. It was about two kilometres away. It was considered the cushy posting because the guy who was doing it had such an easy life, because he was so well organised. When the regular DB Medic cleared out, everyone wanted his position. Webster said; `I'm one of the senior guys here. I should get to do it for my last six months. We had a look at the situation, and decided that it was quite a waste

of resources to continue to fetch and carry him considering that he had breakfast, lunch and supper there, to bring him in to sleep in the bungalow, so we made him a day border. He had to sleep at the prison, and was most upset about this. We said that we would do a two-week rotation. He said; `Don't worry. I'll do it. I'll do it.' At the end of his two week rotation, he said; `Two week rotation is almost up, isn't it?' After that we kind of changed the rules back to normal. He made sure that he never got back to the prison.

The time I nearly hit him, was for insolent arrogance. The problem was that he was classified G4K4. He was a hollow chest weed. He just grated everyone. He knew that he could grate you because you couldn't punish him in any physical way. The fact that he brought himself down to size was a plus.

How long were you there for?

Thirteen months leaving there end of June '88 and basically I cleared out of Walvis Bay and I drove straight through to the far side of the country. I took my cat and half of my belongings and half of my bicycle which I should have sold.

Were you finished with the Military at the time?

At the time yeah - the military. I expected them to come looking for me to do camps. But I got two theories. One, my buddy PJ was a computer programmer, one of a very few national servicemen who ever worked on the main frame computer and he jokingly suggested a virtual sex change, in that way they would never call me up. I joke about it but I didn't think that he ever did it, but maybe he had. The other theory is maybe that the clerks saw Nursing Officer or assumed I was a woman – skipped calling me because of the presumption. I did get seconded to a Medical Reserve Battalion which was based in Cape Town. I never queried why I was never bothered by camp commitments.

What did you do after that in June '88. You cleared out in June '88?

June '88 I then got back to Durban and picked up I did a couple of Unisa subjects and a couple of other courses. There were two Unisa subjects and three matric rewrite subjects.

Chapter Twelve

Chocolate Soldier
(An Equestrian Rifleman's Story)

Murray Hickling
2 SA Infantry, Walvis Bay 1984 - 1985
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

"They took our youth and they took our innocence"

The reason that this story is called "chocolate soldier" is because of the colour uniform we used to wear in the SADF (South African Defence Force) in the days of Apartheid. I have tried to remember the sequence of events in those far off days. If there are any inaccuracies in my story, I apologise. I have however best tried to recollect events and characters that go together to make up this story, in the most realistic fashion, hence all the profanity - that's how it was! I hope you take as much pleasure in reading this as what I have had in writing it.

Murray Hickling,
London, March 2003

BASICS - 2ND SOUTH AFRICAN INFANTRY

It all started early one morning early in January 1984. I was standing at Bloemfontein station with my family waiting to board the troop train to 2nd South African Infantry (Walvis Bay). When I had received my call-up instructions there seemed a romantic element attached to the fact that I would be posted to a foreign country.

There was a large man in browns wearing the rank of a Sergeant Major on his arm, who was chatting to concerned parents and their soon to be conscripted sons. He seemed very attentive and genuinely concerned at their questions and worries. We were called onto the train and we said our goodbyes amid tears and good luck hugs.

I found myself in a compartment with 4 - 6 other guys and pretty soon we had acquainted ourselves and were chatting among each other and sharing jokes. Our escorts were troops from the Parabats in Bloem as well as a few corporals from 2 S.A.I , they were all carrying R4`s (Israeli Galil) and although weren't saying much we were getting very knowing looks. We dropped the Parabats off in Kimberly and picked up some more conscripts. As the journey continued (we would only reach our destination the next evening), there was lots of laughing and general banter going on. The compartment door

flew open and there stood a man in browns bearing the chevrons of a corporal. He asked us to politely keep the noise down. One of my compartment mates passed a smart remark to this request; The corporal gave him an evil look and enquired "*Wat se jy piel?*"(What do you say dick?). For the rest of the journey this particular miscreant was known only by the name of "*piel"* (dick)

We were called into the dining car in groups and asked to fill out paperwork about our education and miscellaneous information. I noticed the same burly Sergeant Major in the dining car; he must have seen the confusion in my face having to fill out all these forms in Afrikaans. He came over and helped me fill them out correctly. Among other things he asked me if I would like to try for rank as I had a Std 10(Form 6) exemption. I replied that yes I would like to try for rank. He then put my paperwork in a separate pile. At about 8 o clock the following evening we reached Walvis Bay station. We disembarked the train and milled around on the platform. The Sergeant Major and a few corporals ushered us to tables set up with urns of coffee and sandwiches. After being told to down our coffee we were told to board the waiting trucks. We were separated according to the forms we had signed and those of us that wanted to get rank

The ride to Rooikop took us through the small town of Walvis Bay and into the desert. On arrival we were told to "*Tree Aan"* (muster) in front of the Quartermasters store and then told to queue up so that we could receive our kit issue. There was a trestle table set up outside with a small stocky sergeant behind it. He told us to empty the contents of our *balsak* (Kitbag) on the ground and rapidly began explaining the various pieces of paraphernalia "*dit is n juk*", (this is a yoke) and he would attach various pieces of webbing to it. There were many confused looks among the assembled audience as he explained his way through everything that we had been issued. We were then told to go to a second store a way away where we were issued with "*trommels"* (steel trunks) containing blankets sheets and a pillow and then told to find a tent. We all buddied up to carry these cumbersome steel trunks and our kitbags to the tents. The sweat was pouring off me and the weight of it all felt like a ton. We would walk a little way and then swap sides and rest a short time. Eventually we all found a tent to move into in lots of six.We busied ourselves with putting blankets and sheets on our beds and a while later one of the sergeants came around and told us it was lights out. I fell into a deep sleep and had a strange dream of an annoying cricket that kept chirping and it just wouldn't shut up. Until I heard a shouted command *"staan op!"*(get up).I realised the cricket was dressed in brown and wearing two stripes and bearing a whistle. It was then that it hit me "Oh God! I'm in the army!"

The next few days were spent filling in more paperwork and going through the medical classification process. I had the unfortunate experience of meeting my commanding officer, Lt Prins first hand. My transgression was that I had filled in some paperwork incorrectly. When I handed it to him I promptly received a slap through the face. He was very quick to apologise though, but it certainly brought home the fact that I was in for a very hard time in the SADF.

We were all divided into platoons under the command of a Lt and a Corporal (Lt Odendaal and Corporal Hamman). They were national servicemen just like us. In the following weeks we realised how lucky we

were, the section leader platoons had Sergeants Potgieter and Swart and the biggest squad of light duties due to all the *opvok* (punishment P.T) they got. Pottie was the man I remembered from the store showing us how to put our kit together. Swart was big and blond and had a missing front tooth and a worse attitude than Pottie. He also had a bad *brei* (South African burr). I can still hear his voice in my head "*Rowerrrrrrrr` ardloop! , Raakie draad*." (Recruit run and touch the fence) The company Sergeant Major was the Sergeant Major, (one Frans van As) aka *spore* (footprints) from the train. He was a hard man but he was very fair. He always threatened "*opvok"* but I can't say I ever remember his wrath.

As with any good Sergeant Major he had a very eloquent turn of phrase, which was demonstrated early on in basic training. We were drilling one day when this booming voice declared, "*Spog nou manne soos `n pou met sewe trille"* (show off men like a peacock with seven dicks). We really had to stop ourselves smiling that day, as any soldier will tell you, don't piss the Sergeant Major off! He also had other favourite expressions whilst on the parade ground "*Moenie vir my so kyk nie ek naai nie mans nie*" (Don't look at me that way I don't fuck men) Another favourite was "*Moenie vir my so kyk nie jy het nie die geld en ek het nie die tyd nie*" (Don't look at me that way you don't have the money and I don't have the time)

One day the entire company was called into the *menasie* (Mess Hall). We were faced by a furious Sergeant Major "*Wie het my kak pot gebreek?"*(Who broke my shit pot?) he was faced by blank looks from the gathered company. It turned out that in the troops toilet some lovely child had kicked a toilet to pieces and this was the reason that the assembled company had one unhappy Sergeant Major. He then demanded that we all give R2 to the company fund to buy another "*kak pot"* (shit pot) we duly obliged rather than face anymore haranguing. In the following weeks we were getting licked into shape through running 2,4`s P.T and drilling.

Anyone who has had the misfortune to be out of time on the parade ground will know that sometimes the punishment can be pretty painful. In this case the unfortunate recipient received the unwelcome attention of the hung over Lt (Odendaal) *Wat die vok is dit! ,ek verkrag jou vokkin voetjie* (What the fuck was that! , I'm going to rape your fucking foot) whereupon he proceeded to stamp the offending appendage into the ground. Needless to say our *maatjie* (buddy) had to stand dead still while his punishment was meted out-poor soul. On another occasion one of my fellow recruits had neglected to shave, Lt Odendaal was doing shaving inspection, again bright sunlight and a thumping headache did not help his demeanour, the unlucky recipient was ordered *"skeer met n klip"*(shave with a stone) which was promptly handed to him. He gingerly pulled the stone lightly down his cheek *"Nee nie so nie, SO!"* (Not like that, like THIS!) Said the Lt scoring the top layer of skin and drawing blood, *"Nou kan jy skeerpas kry*"(Now you're excused from shaving). Needless to say we had very smooth cheeks after that!

One day we were again summonsed to the *menasie* (Mess Hall) where the Sergeant Major decided to give us a lecture on cleanliness I remember very little on the bulk of it, however a phrase springs to mind *"Julle moet die toilette skoon hou. As ek my kak pot by die huis vuil los, -DAN VOK MY VROU MY OP! ,SY`S NET SO KORT MAAR SY VOK MY OP!"* (You must

leave the toilets clean, if I leave my shit pot at home dirty then my wife fucks me up, she's very small but she fucks me up!) God this man was a peach! I could just imagine his diminutive wife chasing him around his garden and giving him *"opvok"*

Pottie was really outdoing himself. On one occasion a driver had come to collect the light duties to take them to the main camp to see the doctor (probably most of Pottie`s and Swart`s handiwork). He was sitting in his truck muttering to himself about what a horrible place our camp was-*"Dis `n poes plaas die"* (This is a cunt farm). Lo and behold but who should have been within earshot but Pottie himself. *"Wat se jy?"* (What do you say?) To which the poor unfortunate replied *"niks nie sersant*" (nothing sergeant). Yes you guessed it, he got *"Opvok",* but with a difference, every time he came back from being chased, Pottie would scream at him *" WAT IS DIT DIE!"* (WHAT IS THIS!) To which he would have to scream back *"DIS `N POES PLAAS DIE!"* (THIS IS A CUNT FARM!) We were standing around laughing at this poor mans terrible luck, having had lots of this ourselves.

During this time we learned about rank and saluting. *Salueer en ere bewys* (Saluting and showing respect) We had this lecture given to us by Sergeant Potgieter he was questioning various people about the various ranks and when he came to the rank of sergeant he said "W*at is dit?*"(What is this?) To which the victim replied, "*Dis `n sersant se rang*"(that is a sergeants rank) the blunt reply came back "*Nee dis verkeerd dit se hier doos!*"(No that's wrong it says cunt here) The way we felt about the two of them at this time about sums up the truth of that statement!

After about a month the various units came around looking for volunteers. The idea that I was entertaining was that I would go to infantry school get rank (hopefully Lt) and join the parachute battalion. Alas it was not to be. I was sad saying goodbye to all the good friends I had made in the month or so of basics at Walvis Bay (Paul Hundt, Dominick Jones, Gus von Gusenhoven, Henning-his surname escapes me now some 20 years on, Justin Strydom, Danie Campher and many more fine people) They were deservedly going to become the next years junior leaders.

Those of us that were left behind were then moved to the main camp in Walvis Bay town. We were assigned bungalows and separated according to education. I was feeling a little low not having made it to infantry school, but I could see that we were being earmarked already for section leaders course. I REALLY did not like this idea because it would put me directly in the path of Pottie and Swart as they had continually threatened their troops *"Seksie leiers ons gaan mos Spes Bona toe"* (Section leaders were going to Spes Bona).

A few days later we were all assembled in front of the *Commandant* (Lt Colonel) He introduced a full Lieutenant by the name of Lieutenant Black and proceeded to tell us that he was from the Equestrian Centre (*Berede*) and that they were recruiting. My spirits sank when he said, "*Moterfietse is vol*" (Motorcycle platoon is full) I was really hoping to get into the bikes. I applied anyway for horses with a few lies "*Ja ek kan perd ry,ek ry op my oom se plaas elke naweek"* (I ride on my uncles farm every weekend). Lt Black looked at me with cold eyes and his walrus like moustache and demanded "*Rook jy dagga!*"(Do you smoke marijuana!) *"Nee*"(No) I replied, "well that's it I haven't made it," I thought. However I was called forward when the names

were called out along with many friends I had made at Rooikop among them Joey Breytenbach and Jan Labuschagne. It was then I was nicknamed "*pyp*" (pipe) due to my supposed marijuana smoking abilities.

SADF EQUESTRIAN CENTRE

After an uneventful train journey we arrived at Potch and were then transported through the town and out onto the Fochville road, past 3 SAI and 10 Artillery; my new home was quite a way out of town. I looked at this strange new place and wondered what the next few months would hold for me. We were all assigned bungalows and platoons. I was assigned to Platoon 1 along with Jan and Joey as bungalow mates.

Our new rank was a Sergeant de Wet and a Lt Swanepoel. Basics continued with the usual running of 2,4`s P.T , inspections and lectures. The inspections didn't seem as bad as they were in Rooikop (I didn't have to make my *balsak* square for one thing). There was a difference though, and that was the call *"Tree aan vir perde voer"* (muster for horse feeding). It was a very unpopular pastime as we would have to get up a half an hour earlier and we had to repeat this process at between 4-5 at night too. We all wanted to ride but we never realised the work associated in keeping and maintaining horses.

A few particular incidents I do remember of that time was, we were doing an assault coarse at *Bloubos* (Bluebush) and part of it involved crawling through a pit that all the corporals were standing around and throwing in buckets of horse shit and water and mixing it all up into a vile watery mess while laughing at us crawling through the liquid manure. On another occasion we were deemed to have a filthy bungalow and a sub standard inspection *"Julle kaserne is sif julle inspeksies is kak,en my vrou wil nie naai nie"* (Your bungalows are dirty ,your inspections are shit ,and my wife doesn't want to fuck). On that occasion Sergeant De Wet was in a particularly evil mood and he made us leopard crawl through *"Die sif gat"* (The filthy hole).This was an underground septic tank where all the kitchen waste was draining to and it was leaking, as a consequence the ground over it was a soaking, muddy, disgusting smelling quagmire of rancid fat and associated kitchen waste. The smell was the worst thing I have ever come across to date, it was sickening.

Around that time we had a fatality in the camp too, there was an *ou man* (lit: old man-2nd year conscript) who had been stealing ammunition and hiding it on some farmland outside the camp. He was caught and was due to be brought on charges. Tragically he decided to take his own life (by shooting himself through the head), rather than face the possibility of a court marshal and military prison. I believe Sergeant De Wet was trying despeRately to save his life by holding his shattered skull together, hearing that story I felt a lot better about my new platoon sergeant.

I was beginning to get a feel for my new platoon mates, who had come from most of the units in the SADF. There are one or two names that stick out in my mind during this time, (Gregory Fischbach, Warren Soul, Buys and Dave Furness.) All of these people had their own particular type of hell to endure. If James Dean thought he was the rebel without a cause then he was sadly mistaken, the name Fischbach springs to mind instantly. Greg was a beaut, he flatly refused to speak Afrikaans although he could understand

everything that was going on around him. So you would have roll call and every man jack would answer "*Teenwoordig Korporaal"* (Present corporal).

Fischbach however insisted on the English version of "*Present corporal*", he looked scrawny and weedy and he had a high piping voice. This definitely did not help his case, as time and again the fury of the rank would come down on his head.

When he was getting *"opvok*" for some real or imagined misdemeanour the rank would always ask him *"Fischbach is jy moeg?"*(Fischbach are you tired?) To which Greg would reply "*No Corporal/Sergeant/Lieutenant*" until they eventually would tell him just to *"Vokoff!" (*Fuck off!) They really couldn't break him, he really was a tough kid!

As for Warren and Buys they suffered with Greg because they were *"Fichbach se maatjies"* (Fischbach`s buddies); both of them were also *"Hardegat Engelsmanne*" (Hard ass Englishmen).

Greg had a very amusing habit when walking into the bungalow he would greet all and sundry with *"Zubbiedoo brothers",* what this meant is anyones guess.

He never used to refer to himself as Greg or Gregory when talking about himself in the third person it was always *"Bach".* If this ruffian ever thought he was going to conduct an orchestra he was in for a rude surprise! How often I didn't hear the rank screaming *"Fishbaaaaach !"*

Dave Furness on the other hand was exactly the opposite he was a big guy and he had a very gentle nature. Dave's problems started when he admitted to a welfare officer that he was a heavy user of Marijuana. The rank of course was advised and Sergeant De Wet took all of Dave's belongings apart looking for drugs. What he found though was Dave's fly tying kit. (Containing hooks, feathers and hair of all persuasions) I can just imagine to the uninitiated what this must have looked like, I'm sure the sergeant thought that Dave had turned his hand toward witchcraft! It took lots of patient explaining and demonstration for Dave to convince the sergeant that it was only fishing apparel.

We were rapidly moving towards the big day of getting our "*bokkies"*(Buck head-symbol of S.A.I) The drill squad was being prepared as were the Bike and Horse demo squads. In no time at all we were standing on the parade ground in front of proud parents and girlfriends. We had our wing commander for basics on the P.A system explaining that we were now going to be made into riflemen as we had passed our recruit training. Soon enough the command came "*Doibieeees af ,Hoofdeksels op*"(Doibie = Plastic inner helmet, worn by all recruits in the SADF, hoofdeksel=beret).

After putting our dark green berets on with our shiny new "*bokkies and balkies*"(buck head and infantry bar) we were dismissed where we could join our parents and girlfriends, and watch the demonstrations to come. I unfortunately had no family there so I was given certain tasks to do during the demo's. Pretty soon the drill squad was out strutting their stuff and showing the proud parents what good soldiers their sons had become.

Our woes began when the first horse demonstration took place. I'd like the reader to imagine the dramatic circus-like effect of a bunch of troops dragging out a hoop on a stand and then setting fire to it. The stunt horseman comes charging across the parade ground and jumps through this hoop of fire. The

problems started after that. We were tasked to kick the stand over and drag it away as the flames were still burning on the hoop, the idea was that they would burn out. Reality dictated otherwise though, we kicked it over and as it hit the ground sparks flew off the burning hoop and set fire to the grass at the back of the parade ground. We then became fire force stamping out burning patches of grass with much cursing vim and vigour. Thankfully the whole camp didn't burn down!

Next up was the troika; this was three horses lashed together, line abreast with the rider balancing in a squatting position on the outer two horses. The problem came about when the lashing broke. The outside two horses departed in different directions and the middle one started running as if it was going to win the Grand National!

Gravity being gravity this left the rider no way but down. He bought about two square metres of parade ground dirt in a pretty little dust cloud. He promptly got to his feet and staggered away. In the meantime the horse company clown was entertaining the parents in front of the main grand stand. He was the smallest guy in the unit and he had a Shetland pony to ride. I forget this horses name, but it was very bad tempered. The clown had fallen off and was trying catch the horse when he received the kick of his life-right in front of the parents on the main grandstand. I would shudder to guess at what was going through parent's minds at this stage.

The big act of coarse was the bike demo squad with a certain individual by the name of rifleman Carl Barnard who was the main jumper for bikes. All the ramps were set up and the bike squad clown was ready. First Carl would jump over 2 or 3 people lying head to foot. As the numbers grew the clown would flirt more and more with danger by messing around in Carls space on his little 50cc bike. The problem came when Carls bike (which was specially tuned) started to misfire. Carl then changed bikes; the stunt was that at the last moment the clown would fall on the last man in line as Carl went over the top. This had worked fine before however Carl didn't have his own bike that day and he landed on the clowns back. The Major (on the P.A) had to apologise to parents and assure them that in fact the clown was all right.

Why is it never that people say that the show *must not* go on? The Major should have said so on this occasion. The next demonstration was taking place on the shooting range. It was due to start with a demo of a South African No.8 landmine destroying a car wreck. Sergeant De Wet being our explosives expert was given this task. He had neglected to tell the Major how long the safety fuse would burn for, (5 long minutes)

Imagine the commentary coming from the P.A system "*As Julle Regs kyk hier is die nr8 Suid Afrikaanse landmyn wat 'n kar opblaas"* (If you look to your right here is the No8 South African landmine destroying a car)…….silence, *As Julle links kyk hier is die R1 geweer"* (If you look left this is an R1 rifle firing), *bang, bang, bang, "Langs dit is…."* (Next to that is…) BOOOOM! There was this huge bang half the civvies shat themselves and they missed the landmine explosion too!

SECOND PHASE

I felt quite good about myself because I had made it through basic training and I looked like a proper soldier now. Well, I reasoned the worst part was over now and the rest was just a case of lectures, and that the rank was going to treat us well right?

Riiiiggggghhht!. When we had got back from weekend pass everyone proudly bedecked in "*bokkies and balkies*" we sat in the bungalow discussing second phase. We were all looking forward particularly to the weapons training. The next day we were shifted to different platoons. I stayed with Sergeant De Wet at his insistence as I was translating weapons handbooks from English into Afrikaans, to enable him to give us lectures. Although there were many other English-speaking people I think the fact that he knew me from basics prompted this insistence. I didn't mind because he wasn't that bad.

Joey and Jan also stayed in the same platoon so it was a good thing all round. We started with the lecture part first and were shown the working parts of the MAG (Belgian FN) machine gun, The M26 hand grenade, The AP 65 rifle grenade, the M79 grenade launcher, Communist Landmines as well as the British MK7, (Yes the enemy had these too!) South African Land mines, The RPG7 Anti Tank weapon, Pyrotechnics (1000Ft flare, 2 Star instant light, 60mm Mortar flare) and the 60mm Patrol Mortar (Better known as the Patmor).

It was round about this time that the company had temporarily lost some men to other units for specialist training (Medics & Intelligence mainly). I was to realise pretty soon how lucky these particular individuals were!

Sergeant de Wet during basics had sometimes worn a little green white and black symbol above his left shirt pocket. As of late he was increasingly wearing this funny looking symbol. We were sitting in an "*instruksie hut"* (Instruction Hut) the one-day discussing the merits and demerits of one of the numerous weapons we were studying. The sergeant would point to someone and fire a question "*Wat is die radius van `n M26 krappie*", (What is the killing radius of an M26, crabby?). As with all our rank each one had his own particular style of addressing us. In Sergeant De Wet`s case the favoured expression was *"Krappie*" (Crabby). Joey was staring at the Sergeants chest. *"Wat is dit Breytenbach?"*(What is it Breytenbach?) the sergeant enquired. "*Wat is daai muishond op jou hemp?"* (What is that skunk on your shirt?) Joey enquired. *"Dis nie n vokken muishond nie. Dis `n Ratel"* (Its not a fucking skunk it's a honey badger) the Sergeant thundered back. He then told us that that symbol meant that he was a qualified tracker.

I found out later that this was one of the hardest things one can do in the SADF, as the failure rate was exceptionally high and very few white soldiers had the abilities to track. This was the domain of the "children of the desert" (bushmen). For a white man to wear that symbol it meant he was pretty exceptional. Apart from the physical harshness of the training, it takes a myriad of other skills like reading weather, fauna and flora, ground conditions and many other things. No wonder the Sergeant was so *"bedonnered*"(pissed off) when his beloved honey badger was relegated to the lowly status of a mere skunk by a *"dom troep"* (dumb trooper).

Another idiosyncrasy the good Sergeant had was the way he used to call out time when he was drilling us. Anyone who has served in the armed forces will tell you that this is a very individual trait. In Sergeant De Wet's case it went like this, "*Psssst Huy, Pssst Huy, Pssst Huy"*. I had to fight the temptation very hard to ask him if he had a puncture in his face! Without doubt this would have resulted in a good session of "*opvok"*

Around about this time two new faces made themselves increasingly common. One was Staff Sergeant Ferreria and the other was Lieutenant Tienie Slabber. Both of these men were tasked to oversee our training in Platoon weapons as Staff Ferreria was the company Sergeant Major of Horse Company and Lt Slabber was the Adjutant. We were to get to know particularly Staff Ferreria very well.

After doing a few weeks of lectures on Platoon weapons and platoon and section tactics, it was now time for the practical aspect. I think the army, in its wisdom, had misnamed this phase. I thought of it more as black phase. I don't know about any other armies, but I can tell the reader with authority about procedures in the SADF and in particular in the typical infantry unit. One of the most common things that seemed wide spread through the SADF for Troops, and in particular infantry Troops, was that whenever you went to any type of "*Baan*"(Range) it meant two thing for definite:

1) You were going to shoot some sort of weapon.

2) You were going to get "*opvok"*.

We really must have lucked out with the gods of war. Every second or third day we were going to some sort of range. It started with the rifle range. We would arrive and spend the morning shooting from the 100,200,300 metre marks. This would take us into early-mid afternoon. The trucks would be tasked to pick us up at round about 5 o` clock. Sooooo the P.F`s (Permanent Force members), Staff Ferreria, Lt Slabber, Lt Slabbert (sometimes), Lt Truter (2I.C) Horse Company and all our associated rank (Sgt De Wet, Lt Swanepoel) would gather in a knot.

Staff Ferreria would then step forward and say "*Tree Aan!"(*Muster). And, Dear Reader, that common funny sounding word you've seen so often through these pages happened yet again! Heeeeeres "*Opvok!"* I could have sworn that the Gestapo trained these people secretly! They seemed to have taken a course in refining pain. As for their creativity and delivery of the aforesaid "*opvok*", well it was exemplary. Sometimes they would divide us into platoons and then get *"opvok*" from not only our own rank but also from one of the other P.F`s

After one particularly brutal session (Lt Slabbert was the inflictor), I remember saying to Burger, a fellow platoon mate "*Daai Lt Slabbert is `n doos*" (That Lt Slabbert is a cunt). He asked "*watse eene?"* (which one), - as there was confusion between Slabber and Slabbert. "*Die ou met die Swart hare"* (The guy with the black hair) I replied. "*Ek onhou hulle so*" (I remember them like this) he said *"Eene eindig in `n R, hy`s `n rooi doos, hys nog ok."* "*Die ander eene eindig in `n T, hy`s `n totale doos"* (The one surname ends in an R he's a red cunt he's still ok, the other surname ends in a T, he's a total cunt.)

Lt Tienie Slabber, wasn't really that bad. He was an English speaking South African, which for a P.F was unusual as they all tended to be Afrikaans

speaking. He sounded very gruff when he used to shout at us but really it was all just for show. I can still hear his voice in my head "*Staf, se vir daardie kakhuis hy moet in pas kom"* (Staff, tell that shithouse to get into step). This man had two favourite expressions; "*Kakhuis*" (shithouse) and "*Spuismuis"* (Kitchen mouse). We all knew him by the nickname of Lt "*Spuismuis"* due to the zealous use of this word by him.

Staff Ferreria on the other hand had two of his own favourite expressions; one was "*bokdekker"* (Buckfucker) and the other one was "*berk"*. For a complete Afrikaner, I find this particular expression remarkably unusual. Living in London now I come across this expression almost exclusively amongst the cockney Englishmen. " *Oi geezer give that berk a clip behind the ear"*.

As the days went on and we moved to bigger and more deadly weapons, so the punishment seemed to increase. I have two recollections of particularly bad punishment sessions, or "*opvoks*". The first occurred at the "*Grenaat baan"* (Grenade range).

We went out that day to learn how to throw live grenades. We spent most of the morning bowling rocks (the SADF must have been trying to save money), as there were no practice grenades.

The action for throwing a grenade is almost like bowling a cricket ball but the projectile is released between the 12-1 `o clock positions. This action was practiced the whole morning. Each of us had to go down to the *"grenaat hokkie*"(grenade cage), a reinforced curved concrete wall about 6ft high and duly throw our grenades in the prescribed manner. We were all finished at about 12 o'clock .We then were all asked to sit in lines and the Staff gave a lecture on the various smoke grenades. He then threw a white phosphor grenade to demonstrate what it looked like. Lunch had been brought to us by the duty driver and set up on two trestle tables. We all queued up and were served lunch. I can't remember what it was, but I do remember it was delicious. The unusual thing was, that there was more than enough and the rank was insistent that we eat our fill. The most unusual part of the meal was the presence of "*Roomys"* (Ice cream). *"Roomys*" was a rumour in the army. We NEVER got any. However today was different there was "*Roomys*" and plenty of it. The ranks were calling everyone back for seconds and even thirds. Some of my "*maaitjies"* (buddies) were making real pigs of themselves.

What's wrong with this picture? You guessed it! We were going to suffer-BIG TIME!

I had picked this up right from the start and had not pigged out, unlike some of my soon to be unfortunate platoon mates. Staff was standing around laughing and joking with a few of us. He then said "*Wil julle sien wat maak `n donnerbuis aan `n staaldak?"* (Do you want to see what a thunder flash does to a steel helmet?). There was a chorus of "*Ja, Ja, Ja"* (Yes, Yes, Yes). He pulled the tab of a thunder flash threw it on the ground, put the helmet over it and stamped the helmet into the ground. There was a big bang and the helmet took off like a rocket straight up for about 70 odd metres. As it reached the top of its arc, he said "*Hardloop om die granaat hokkie"* (Run around the grenade cage). This must have been 300-400 metres distant.

That day we ran, duck walked, leopard crawled, bunny hopped, cursed, shat off and puked. I know that it was an exceptionally brutal "*Opvok"* because of the following incident. After running back to Staff for the howmanyth time he said *"Iemand gebruik sy geweer as `n kruk"* (somebody is using their rifle as a crutch). It was Greg Fischbach, if Greg was that tired then the rest of us were defiantly beyond it. The bastards had been watching us through a binocular, that's how far we were running. It carried on and on. After an eternity Staff said "*Tree Aan"* (Muster). We formed up in an exhausted squad, dog tired, filthy and sweaty. He said "*Staan stil"* (Stand still); it was then that he threw the tear gas grenade between us. There was pandemonium, people were coughing and vomiting and a few fainted. He was standing a safe distance away laughing at us. "*Hoe ruik dit, hoe proe dit?"* (How does it smell? How does it taste?) He chortled. (Anyone who has had tear gas thrown at them will tell you that any wet surface burns like hell, eyes, lungs (Hence the coughing), armpits. You also feel very weak which is why it's used in riots to control huge crowds. By this stage the mood was mutinous between the troops *"Kak Staf, jy's kak Staf"* (Shit Staff, you're shit Staff). "*O, julle se ek is kak nê. Daar gaan julle"* (Oh you say I'm shit –Run). The pain continued once again. That night when I got into my bungalow, I lay on my bed and just passed out-fuck inspection.

The other bad memory was when we were doing *"seksie aanvalle*" (section attacks).

The basis of an infantry attack is the precept of *"Vuur en beveeging"* (Fire and movement). To do this, the section or platoon has to deploy from their patrol formation and come into a *"uitgespreide linie"* (Spread out line). With the command *"Kom in `n uitgespreide linie*"(Come into a spread out line, facing the source of gunfire). This happened when shots were fired at the patrol. Once in this posture the command from the section leader or platoon sergeant would be *"Van links af nommer!"* (Number from the left!). This is looking at the line from behind.

So you would shout *"Alpha!"* and the man on your right hand side would then follow with *"Bravo!"* the man on his right would then follow on with *"Alpha!"* again and so you alternately numbered. The Section leader/Platoon sergeant would then shout *"Alpha beweeg eerste, Alpha-beweeg!"* (Alpha moves first, Alpha-Move!) All the men that had numbered as Alpha would take 3 steps forward while Bravo was shooting past them. (This could be done from a lying, crouching or standing position). When the man had taken 3 steps he would go to ground (Either crouching or prone), he would then signal behind him for the man behind him to come forward. Alpha would now shoot. This man then took 6 steps (3 to the man in front and 3 past). He would then go to ground and call behind him (usually this involved hand waving). This process was repeated until you had gone through the objective.

The other thing with this tactic was that when the section/platoon came into the *"uitgespriede linie"* (Spread out line) the Mortar group would fall back a little way behind the riflemen, and typically in the middle. The machine gun group would typically be on the fringe of the patrol formation, commonly on the high ground. They would then flank the line of riflemen until they were roughly 90 degrees adjacent to the spread out line of riflemen, a little way in front of them.

We practiced this tactic *ad nausiam*; I would like the reader to imagine covering a distance of 100 meters in this fashion. That every 6 steps or so you would have to crouch or throw yourself into the prone position. It's exhausting to say the least. So you do this for the first time and you cover 100 meters. Then you get chased 300 meters and back, only to repeat this all over again. Do that 3-4 times in a row and you're tired but do it 6-7 times and you really don't know how you're going to cope.

We were doing it in the crouching position and the one part of your body that takes a lot of strain is your thighs and hamstrings. They just seem to lock up. Apart from the chasing, Lt Swanepoel and Sergeant De Wet got really inventive and were making us do duck walk. If you can do it sepaRately its ok but these sadists were making us hold on to each other's webbing. The result is that the entire line can only move as fast as the slowest man. And with duck walk the slower you move the worse it is. I remember Deacon, a fellow platoon mate, not being able to move at all as his hamstrings and thigh muscles refused to work. All of us were very close to completely collapsing that day. God help us when we did this with live ammunition!

To do a tactic such as this with live ammunition was very daunting to say the least. The reader should remember that not only were we working with rifles but also we had to contend with mortars being fired over our heads, as well as a machine gun shooting into the ground in front of us. Thankfully we managed to do it without any harmful consequences. We were bitching and moaning at Sergeant De Wet about having to do this live. His comment back at us still stands out in my mind after all these years. He said, *"Julle is vokkin gelukkig julle hoof nie vuur doop te doen nie"* (You're fucking lucky you don't have to do baptism of fire). He had, and that really shut us up. (Baptism of fire involves crawling through an obstacle coarse underneath rifle and machinegun fire. The bullets literally whip past you at a distance of 1-2 feet sometimes even less. The purpose of this is to teach you to keep your head and body as close to the ground as possible, while under fire, the risk of injury or death is enormous.)

The one funny episode we had during this time was when we went on a *"routemars*"(Route march), and we were sleeping under the stars. The Sergeant told us that when we were going to have a crap we should dig a hole, crap and cover it up. One fucker decided he was too lazy. So he went to the top of the hill and shat on the ground wiped his ass and went to bed. The next morning, Sergeant De Wet was walking around and checking that everything was squared away. He looked up and noticed something white at the top of the hill. Upon closer inspection he saw this dirty bastards handiwork. He called us together and demanded to know *"Wie is die vuil bliksim was nie sy kak begrawe nie?"*(Who is the dirty bastard that doesn't bury his shit?) No one owned up. He made us dig a hole at the bottom of the hill. We then had to form a line from the site of the crime to the hole at the bottom. I'm sure you can guess what happened next? Yes, that's right! We had to *"Gee die drol aan*!" (Pass the turd!) I remember seeing the first guy scoop it up and pass it to the second guy. The first guy then took off like his tail was on fire and furiously started wiping his hands on the ground. The second guy followed suit shortly afterwards. When the turd got to me, I was 4th in line, I got 4 pieces. I swiftly passed it back and wiped my hands. Looking back, I saw one

"*maatjie*"(buddy) chasing another holding out his shit-covered hands in front of him, I've never seen a man run uphill so quickly!

I'm sure when the turd got to the guy standing next to the hole he must have got a handful of what must have looked like a crushed flake -Poor Bastard.

I was really relieved when 2nd phase was over and wondered how I ever managed to get through it all.

HORSE PHASE

After that we were divided into our final wings. I was in Horse Company (Ops), Jan was seconded to "*Rykuns"* (Riding Instruction). He would later go to the breeding farm at De Aar, Joey managed to get himself a place in Bike Squad, as he originally was in Horse Company. Well nothing can be worse than second phase? Really! Horse riding is fun!

Oh I forgot to clarify one small point; I forgot to mention Army horse riding. By this time winter was well on its way. It was really beginning to get cold and horse feeding so early in the morning became a rather onerous task. We were then at this stage of our training, handed over to the tender mercies of the *"Rykuns instrukteers."* (riding instructors). The head of their wing was a SADF legend, *Kommandant* (Lt Colonel) Jimmy Stark. The legend runs that he was a poacher in South West Africa .One unique aspect about his poaching activities was that he used to poach from horseback. Another two unusual things about this man were that he had a lippezaner certificate (only a handful of people in South Africa had these). It's the most prestigious award a horseman can get. And he was a top class marksman with a rifle.

The corporals told us that we were going to be asked to choose horses. They told us to be aware that the course was hard and that we should choose horses with a good temperament. A few days on, there we were, choosing our horses from a many horses in a *"kraal"*(corral). I had a friend Roy Douglas-Hendry who was a Stable Master. I asked Roy to help me choose horses that had a good temperament. He willingly obliged and I got two fine animals. One was called "Quest" and the other was called ironically enough "Oorlog"(which means `war'). "Oorlog" was a smallish horse but had a lovely nature. "Quest" on the other hand was a bit bigger and a little livelier. I had really been lucky to have a friend in Roy. Now my " maaitjies" being "*goeie boerseuns"* (good farmers boys) chose the biggest meanest horses they could lay their grubby mitts on. Big mistake and I'm sure you can guess why.

We were also issued with Saddles and bridals and all the associated cleaning materials. (Curry combs, Hoof picks, etc). The style of saddle that we used was called a McClelland, it was a very light saddle with a hole in the middle. Actually a lovely saddle to ride in. Ironically I've never seen one since. It all started very tamely. We were given lectures by the vet on horse care and the corporals gave us a few lectures too. We were BANNED from riding. The closest we came was when we had to clean our horses. Now at this particular time, two *"maaitjies"* (buddies) took a fat chance. They were riding their horses bareback between the stables. One of the corporals was walking around when he noticed our two heroes having a very merry time on horseback. "*Wil julle perdry?*" (Would you like to ride?) he enquired. *"Ja*

asseblief" (Yes please) they gladly responded. "*Gaan haal julle saals en tooms"* (Go and fetch your saddles and bridals). Our two bright-eyed bushy-tailed heroes dashed to the bungalow, and came back within the twinkle of an eye proudly bearing their brand new saddles and bridals. "*Saal op"* (saddle up) said the corporal.

As they started moving towards their horses, he said *"Waar Gaan Jy?"* (Where are you going?). "*Maar Korporal het gese ons moet opsaal"* (But, corporal, you said we must saddle up.) *" Nie die perde nie, jou maaitjie"*(Not the horses, your buddy.) They both adopted looks on their faces that's reminiscent of a slapped bum. *"Hoe nou?"* (How now?) they enquired, so he showed them. He saddled up one guy and put a bridal in his mouth and then he made his *"maaitjie"* (buddy) ride him. They really *"Kaked af"* (Shat off) that day, but by the end of it they had a really good idea of what a horse feels like. The rest of us took no chances.

It wasn't long before the day dawned that we had our first riding lesson. Our riding instructor was a guy by the name of Corporal Steyn. He was, in my opinion, the best instructor of the lot. He had patience and he really loved horses, not to mention the fact that he was one hell of a rider. I can still remember us mounting up and starting with the requested task. We were doing *"Ryskool figure"* (Riding school patterns), so he would say go left around the paddock, stop and turn around and go right around, stop and do a figure of eight pattern.

One of the horses was having a crap when we were doing this, and it started farting. I don't know if it got a fright or if its bum was burning. Anyway it started bucking. Have you ever watched a pot of popcorn cooking? First one pops, and then another, then two or three more, then a whole lot at a time. This is what was happening with 10 horses. There were people flying in all directions and one guy broke his ribs on the barriers. The corporal started screaming at us *"beheer jou perd"*(control your horse) but to no avail. Our first riding lesson was a total shambles.

There were two things that were really drilled into us, *"Hakke af"* (Heels down) and *"Hou jou afstand"* (Keep your distance) one horse length, if memory serves me correctly. We were walking our horses around the riding school when I felt "Quest" buck, I kept my seat but the *"maaitjie"* (buddy) behind me was not so lucky. "Quest" had just kicked him on the knee - ouch BIG TIME! *"Ja, Ja Ja jou dom doos. Sien jy wat gebeur as jy nie jou afstand hou nie"* (Yes, Yes, Yes you dumb cunt. You see what happens when you don't keep your distance), screamed the corporal, another one for the growing squad of light duties.

Our wing commander was a man by the name of Captain Van Deventer. I think in all my time in the army, he was the only officer I considered a gentleman too. One day he showed us what a well-disciplined horse could do. He was making this horse go backwards, sideways around in circles, gosh! all sorts! He was a wonderful rider, but then again he did represent the SADF in shows. I got the distinct feeling he was quite a ladies man (Very unusual for an officer in the SADF). There was a rumour going around that one of the guards had bust him and a pretty woman Lieutenant in the teff store one night having a shag. Given his charming manner and his rakish demeanour it's quite likely, in my book.

Our R.S.M at this stage was becoming quite ambitions with his parades. We were doing battalion parade one day and he drilled the whole damn lot of us (about 200) around his small parade ground, this is when I really heard a gem. If anyone knows, imagines or has seen a Regimental Sergeant Major, picture this beaut. He was an *"Omie"*(uncle), bristling moustaches ramrod straight back and a voice like a fog horn. And lets not forget that ever-famous piece of SADF equipment; you guessed it the *"Visser stok"* (Drill stick). We were standing to attention when somebody moved, the *"Visser stok"* got pointed at the culprit like a finger of doom and the foghorn like voice screamed, *"As jy weer beweeg, dan druk ek hierdie visser stok deur jou ore en ry jou rond die parade grond soos `n Harley Davidson"* (If you move again, I'll take this drill stick and shove it through your ears, and ride you around the parade ground like a Harley Davidson). The culprit paled. I was mortified because I had no idea that the RSM was entertaining ideas to joining the Hells Angels!

Winter was upon us with a vengeance. I remember going home one weekend and my dad looked at me and said "My god, my boy, look at your hands!" They were swollen and covered in infected cuts. This was as a result of stopping teff nets for the horses at some obscure hour in the bitterly cold mornings. My skin had dried out very badly.

The weekends when we had to stay in camp weren't too bad. We'd maybe stand guard or just be left alone. On Sundays though we'd go on out rides to the 3rd phase course, near *"Bloubos"* (Bluebush). It was about three kilometres away. The big thing was the race back to camp. I was riding "Oorlog" and I was about 5 people away from the leading horse (Cpl Steyn), when past me this big horse came bearing Beytendach, he had this smug expression on his face as he passed me as if to say "Look at your piss willy horse!" A little way further on, I passed Beytendach. He was staggering around because his horse had stood in a hole and he came a cropper. I was howling with laughter at his misfortune. This guy features later in the story as well. He really seemed accident-prone.

Well it seems to have calmed down in this mans army - no way! We were still getting *"opvok"*. This time, from the riding instructors a favourite was the "Irish Bank" and the "Devils Dyke". It is three jumps up, then three jumps on the down incline and then a drop of about two and a half metres into the "Devils Dyke" then about two or three jumps up again. This was designed for horses not people. Are they thick in the army? We always had to run this with all our *"saaltuig"* (saddlery) so things always got lost. Curry combs, hoof picks especially. I lost a bridal once; if you lose something in the army, you pay for a new one out of your own pocket. I thought this was unfair because it was due to us getting *"opvok"* with our saddlery that this was happening. What would you do? I had inspection the next day and I needed a bridal. Well whom would you call? Do I hear the name of that funny conductor bloke? Indeed I do! I went to "Bach" and I asked him to help. "Sure Hicks" he replied. I went to him for a very good reason. He and Buys were robbing every conceivable store in the camp, and that night it was the saddle stores turn. Suffice to say in no time at all I had a brand new bridle. Thanks "Bach." These two mad people also broke into the Major's office and into the safe and they stole rank. When they hitch hiked, they were always officers or N.C.O`s.

I really wonder how many unsuspecting troops from other units got *"opvok"* from Corporal Fischbach and Lieutenant Buys. I can just imagine some poor Artillery trooper coming back from pass and telling his *"maaitjies"* what bastards this corporal and Lieutenant were from *"Berede"*.

Our inspections had become a whole lot harder because we had an extra piece of kit to clean, namely all our saddlery. We were standing corporals inspection one morning when a corporal walked past one of my platoon mates and looked at his snaffle. This man had forgotten to clean it. If you've ever ridden a horse for a protracted period of time you will know that there is lots of spit and grassy type of cud in the horse's mouth. This had hardened on the snaffle. *"Wat is dit die?"* (What is this?) The corporal enquired. *"Spoeg"* (Spit) came the reply. *"En jy wil dit in jou perd se bek sit? Lek!"* (And you want to put this in your horse's mouth? Lick!). He gingerly extended his tongue and very delicately licked the dirty snaffle. *"So!"* (Like this!) growled the corporal shoving the bit into the man's mouth. I saw his face go the colour of the grassy cud he was licking. This was the quickest way to get us to make sure our bits were cleaned after riding.

One Friday night we were all sitting in the bungalows relaxing when one of my friends from another platoon came up to me. He asked me if I could go to the troops' bar and get him and another guy a six-pack of beer each. He knew the barman but they had been banned from the bar due to drunkenness. I agreed to go and fetch the 2x 6 packs of beer. On the way back I bumped into Roy Douglas-Hendry. He offered to help me carry the beer back to the bungalow. I thanked him and passed him a six-pack. As we were walking between the bungalows we heard a voice *"Waar gaan julle"* (Where are you going?). This figure stepped into the light and I nearly shat in my pants! It was none other than RSM Du Plessies (Mr Harley Davidson himself). He told us that we had to report to him on Monday because we were not allowed to have alcohol in the bungalows. After a very tense weekend, Roy and myself reported to him in his office. He said that this was a very serious offence and that we should report to our company Sergeant Majors. Roy reported to his Staff and I reported to Staff Ferreria. Roy got given a tractor tyre to flip as *"opvok."* Staff Ferrera said I was going to get a *"Bloubos bussie"*. If there is a hell that must be its name! The route is about 5-8 kilometres long and every 100 metres or so you stop and do push ups, buddy P.T, Star jumps etc. No one had ever made it back to camp. They had all collapsed. I waited about a week for this hell of hells and I was never called. I went to Staff eventually and asked what was happening he just said *"vergeet dit"* (forget it). Staff had a heart after all! I really felt sorry for Roy - poor guy.

It was about three quarters of the way into horse phase that I started having problems with my hernia. I needed an operation, I was duly sent to the doc who said the best thing would be surgery. Shortly after that I found myself at 3 Military Hospital in Bloemfontein. Having a hernia operation is a very painful business indeed. After my op, I was the laughing stock of the ward as I was walking around like I had a broomstick up my ass. There were a few characters in the ward with me, one being an old school friend. We had another guy called *"Flippie"*. He had been in a car smash and had a punctured lung. The big challenge for us was making this guy laugh. When he laughed,

the bottle that was draining the lung fluid, would have bubbles blown into it. He really had a hard time with us.

It was at this time I was to meet the nemesis of my innocence. My school friend had a girl he was seeing at the time. She was, it would appear to the casual onlooker, a little on the wild side. She had a friend who was, how should I put this, was rather portly! Anyway for the purposes of this story I shall call her "Fat Annie". Her friend I shall call Madame M. Whilst in hospital, a paratrooper Lieutenant had come in. He had been shot while doing *"Vuur en beveeging"* (Fire and movement). Apparently they had moved forward too quickly and had walked into their own machine gun fire. The hairs on my forearms stood up, as it was still fresh in my mind. Thank goodness we had come through it ok.

After being discharged, I was given a few days pass and 6 months light duty. I returned to my unit as everyone was coming to the end of horse phase. All the light duties had tasks to perform, i.e. painting the fence posts and sweeping in front of the bungalows etc. We were very lazy at this time because we thought the corporals could do nothing to us because we were light duties. Wrong again! One corporal started berating us for being lazy and we told him that he couldn't chase us because we were light duties. *"Ok dan doen ons kussing P.T"* (OK then well do pillow P.T). He told us to put our arms out straight; he then put a pillow on the forearms. You cannot believe how tired your shoulders become trying to hold up a pillow in the prescribed manner. We weren't so cheeky after that.

BUSH PHASE

The whole company was preparing to go to "Mosita" for bush phase. Trucks were being packed and people readying themselves. I went along with my platoon. We got to our bush camp and soon everything was concentrated on training once again. After about a week of sitting around in the tent, occasionally being called out to "Do chicken parade"(Picking up papers), I requested to go on orders in front of the Captain. I asked to be given something to do as I was sick of hanging around and hiding away from the P.F.s. He said that there was 4 things I could do. 1) Become a canteen tiffy (Didn't fancy selling chocolates) 2) Become a storeman (Didn't fancy issuing kit, it sounded boring) 3) Become a clerk (I HATE paperwork) or 4) Become a company signaller (This sounded the best out of everything). So I was put with the rest of the signallers and taught how to use a radio.

While working in the H.Q an incident took place. Lieutenant Mostert came storming into the H.Q and promptly slammed a bullet on the table in front of the captain with the words *"Ek kla vir Furness aan!"* (I'm charging Furness!). Apparently Dave had cocked his rifle while this Lieutenant was chasing them around. Captain Van Deventer dealt with it in a calm manner and he asked Dave's side of the story. (Dave said he was clearing his rifle). The Captain believed him, but I had my doubts because I knew my platoon mates were having a hell of a hard time.

The only other incident worth mentioning at this time was the death of Major Gower's family. Major Gower was at that time the youngest Major in the S.A.D.F, apart from this unique honour, he was, I believe, a demon with a

"snotneus" (M79 grenade launcher). He could put a grenade into a 44 gallon drum at a considerable distance.

What the reason was for this tragedy no one quite knew. The Major's wife had shot their two children and herself. I cannot imagine how that poor man must have been feeling.

At the end of this phase there was great consternation in the camp. The troops were told to *"Tree aan",* and given live ammunition. Thinking this was an operation I ran to the Major and asked him if there was anything I could do to get involved. He made me his signaller. As it turns out we were sent to Sebokeng to do township duty. I sat in the back of his *"bakkie"* (Pickup) all day and sent and received signals.

In the meantime Warren Soul, who had fractured his forearm falling off a horse during bush phase, was due to be posted out to us in Sebokeng as his injury had healed. He was at the base in Potch at the time and he REALLY didn't want to do township duty. What Warren did still amazes me to this day. He promptly took his now healed arm and rebroke it on the split poles in front of the H.Q. Have all my friends gone completely mad? I really had to wonder. Township duty was really boring. After about two weeks of this we were sent on 14 day pass. After this we were going to be posted to the border for 14 months.

This particular pass was really a turning point in my life. Remember the two girls I met while I was in hospital? Well one night while I was out with a friend "Fat Annie" came running up to me demanding a lift from the hotel we were drinking at. She and "Madame M" had been playing their favourite game. This involved going to a bar penniless and sideling up to single men and flirting in a manner that was dripping with promise. After they had got drunk on his account they would disappear. That night Fat Annie had a particularly amorous fan. She ran up to me and asked if I could take her home. I obliged but … I didn't take her home. I drove her out of town. I pulled up on a dust road and, well, we took turns in mounting each other and disgracing each other's families.

Now I'd like you to imagine walking along a sun drenched beach and if you happen to chance across a baby whale, imagine my situation that night! Be thankful that the whale never rolled over onto you. It's not just heavy, its real *"Afkak"* (Shitting off). The fruits of our combined labour that night resulted in two things. My cigarette lighter got kicked off, and there was a big wet patch on my front seat. So if you own a dark blue Mazda 323 with a broken cigarette lighter and a stain on the passenger seat, please treat it with respect. It's what was left of my innocence!

After that evening I really became a charmer and I got stuck into Madame M too. I had such a blast on that pass and I thought it fitting I should go to the border properly prepared!

The pass came to an end far too soon for my liking, these two girls were keeping me VERY busy.

BORDER PHASE

Shortly after that pass we found ourselves asked to stand at ease after parade, one of our Sergeant Majors had just got back from the border. He told

us the following: *"SWAPO het gisteraand Ondangwa geref"* (SWAPO has bombarded Ondangwa base last night). We looked at each other with trepidation, knowing we were to be going up there in a few days. The time flew by and it wasn't long when we found ourselves on buses on out way to Waterkloof AFB to catch a flight to South West Africa. On the plane up I had a little vindication. While I was at "Moseta," I was the target of one particularly bigoted Afrikaner *"Jy`s a kak sleg Englesman"* (You're a shit useless Englishman). He'd never managed to live down the Anglo-Boer war. On the flight up he was VERY friendly to me. Then I realised why. If he and his call sign were in trouble they wouldn't call "Ghost busters" they would be calling – ME. This was becoming quite nice. Some people actually realised that without me they were stuck.

We "*Klaared in"* at Otavi base as we had been seconded to SWASPES (South West African Special Forces). From there we moved to Okatope Base under the legendary Captain W.J Barnard aka *"Yati Spider"*. When one thinks of this man, the following words spring to mind: *"When I run the hounds of hell, I twist my foot, I nearly fell, I was lucky to be alive, one look back I could have died…I am a sole survivor"*. These words were written and performed by the pop group called Asia. They did, I believe belong to *"Yati"*

His story is really quite remarkable. A few years before he had taken a patrol into Angola. They had walked into an ambush and everyone had been killed. *"Yati"* had been badly wounded (Shot in the thigh and upper arm). He had managed to escape and when they found him, he was on a section of the Caprivi Strip (Part of SWA) –known as the "Yati". He was so weak, he was crawling and when the choppers found him they say from the air he looked like a spider. This was a well-told story when I was there; whether it's the real truth I'll never know. (I did see the wounds though-so he WAS shot).

He was a character that I believe inspired fear in those around him. His voice in particular was menacing. Have you ever heard the low moan that a lion sometimes makes? Its not loud but its scary and it carries quite a distance. "Yati" had this kind of rough, rasping voice. Apart from that he was short and very powerfully built. Put all of these things together and a mean attitude and you've got hardship coming your way.

Pretty soon we were squared away and fell into base life. Staff Ferreria had come up with us as Company Sergeant Major. One day he was walking through the lines while I was doing *"Klaarstaan"* (Stand ready). My bed had been lain on and not pulled right. For my trouble I was given a *"Cubessak"* (50 kg bag of horse pellets). I only weighed about 65kg myself at this stage. He was chasing me with this infernal bag, and telling me to do push-ups with it on my back. I managed about 6. I soon realised that this was standard procedure in THIS base.

Staff Ferreria left us after about three weeks and we got a new company Sergeant Major (Staff Van Rensburg). Staff was always shouting at someone, but I don't think he was nearly as strict as the Captain himself. It was shortly after this that I was asked by the captain to call "Dryer" (Signal storeman). There was a radio that was broken in the H.Q. Dryer stood to attention in front of the Captain and "Yati" started slapping him upside the head. *"Dryer*, klap, *hoekom ,* klap, *werk hierdie radio nie*, klap, *hmmmm*, klap." (Dryer, slap, why, slap, does this radio not work, slap, hmmm, slap). All Dryer could do is

squawk at the Captain like a chicken. I'm sure he was feeling like the lions lunch! "Yati" once caught me out too (for not putting the pins in the correct R.V`s for the various call signs.) *"Kry vir jou `n cubessak."* That litany I heard a lot in my time there although this was the last time for me!

All the H.Q signallers, medics, and store men were living in a tent and to our great irritation, so was a corporal that used to try and order us around. "Basson," one of the medics was the *"fly spy tiffie*" (Poison spray to control flies). He was spraying the entrance of our tent, when we came upon a brainstorm. Why not do the corporals bed too! "Basson" sprayed his bed so well it was soaked. The corporal upon his return hit the roof. He called "Basson" in and wanted to punish him. At this stage our protector came into his own. His name was "Diff" De Villiers. He was a short stocky guy and he used to be a wrestler. Diff simply confronted this corporal and told him to *"Vok uit ons tent uit"* (Get the fuck out of our tent). The corporal left and never came back. No one messed with us after that.

About four months after arriving at Okatope the Captain decided instead of going to Ondangwa for the weekend, his wife was going to spend a weekend at Okatope.

Mmmmm! Now be aware that there were no woman on base-at all! We were young and fit and by that stage our hormones were bouncing around like ping pong balls!

The Captain's wife arrived that evening, and the next morning was seen strutting around the base in short pants and a low cut top. If memory serves me correctly she was a fairly good-looking woman too, she had dirty blond hair and lovely legs. The thing that I think drove everybody mad were the big blue flirtatious eyes. I wonder if it was her way of giving us *"opvok"* or if it was the long arm of the Captain reaching out to us through her. That night I wonder how many guys had wet dreams, and those that didn't, how many were doing "the 5 knuckle shuffle"? What about me you may ask? I was cleaning my rifle-all night!

About 6 months into my tour I was called to the Captains office. As was his custom he would sniff, look at his watch (on the side of his wrist), he couldn't turn his wrist due to his bullet wound. *"Hickling, jy gaan op pas,"* (Hickling, you're going on pass) he said. I wasn't meant to be going on pass yet. I had about a month to go! He then told me my father had just been made Mayor of Bloemfontein and that, he (Yati) had received a signal from 53 Battalion, requesting that RFN Hickling be given pass to attend the inauguration of the Mayor.

My woes were just starting. After attending the aforesaid inauguration, spent in the company of two firemen (mayor's drivers), and one saying to the other *"Ek gaan soveel kos eet laat my poepol soos `n gries nipple lyk*"(I'm going to eat so much food that my asshole is going to look like a grease nipple) This well behaved civilian had become a really rough soldier! I looked up "Fat Annie" and Madame M. Again by this stage I was really doing well (even Madame M`s sister was after me!). I was having a great time and my pass was over too soon. I was actually missing all my friends on the border and was always wondering if they were OK.

I returned to the border happy to see all my friends again. De Witt. a fellow signaller, realising, I had just returned from pass, said *"Jou Cherie le*

en sweet in `n ander man se arms." (Your girlfriend is lying sweating in another mans arms.) *"Ja ek weet. Sy moet mos oefen sodat sy reg is as ek weer terug gaan ."* (I know. She has to practice so that she's ready for me when I go back) I replied. That shut him up. I didn't care anyway. I was just having fun.

The radio drills varied from call sign to call sign. The two most outstanding examples I remember were Gary and Joey. Gary McCay was the bike squad signaller. He used to call me in the following manner: "Slowpoke, Slowpoke, Rodriguez" "Slowpoke GO!" I'd reply. The proper drill was like this, we were call sign Four Zero so it should have been " Four Zero, Four Zero, Four One Bravo" This all happened when we were watching a Speedy Gonzales cartoon and instead of the fastest mouse in Mexico, the cats are trying to catch the slowest mouse in Mexico yes you guessed it "Senior Slowpoke Rodriguez" but he had a gun!

Joey was the other culprit he would call *"Pyp pyp, pyp, kom in my Bra."* If the Captain ever caught us on the radios with such bad discipline he would have issued a whole store full of *"Cubessakke."* If that was bad, what usually followed from Joey would really have freaked the Captain out. All the commanders were known as "9" so Captain would be "49" and the Lt from bike Squad would be "49 bravo." Joey however would speak something like this *"Pyp se vir Yati , Daddy Cool soek hom"* (Pipe tell Yati Daddy Cool is looking for him). Daddy cool was the commander of bike squad; what an apt name too.

It was roundabout this time when tragedy, and nothing short of a miracle struck us. We had a call sign in the field and they were trying to make Comms (Communication) with the base. A common practice was that a *"Skuinsdraad"* (Long wire antenna) was thrown into a tree or high point. In this case it was thrown into the "v" of a high-tension power line. This is where everything went tragically wrong. The guys throwing the wire missed the "v" and it went onto the live wires. Appelkryn and Van Den Berg were the two people carrying out this task. One was holding the wire and the other was holding the radio.

To witness what happened next must have been horrific. I don't know how many thousands of volts those wires carry. One account told of one of these guys hair catching fire. The force was so great that both of them had toes blown off as their feet earthed to the ground. "Shone" if memory serves me correctly was the medic. When the wire had burned through, he sprang into action. He got the biggest guys in the platoon (some of who were crying at this stage), to hold these screaming people down, so that he could put in drips and give pain relief. He managed to stabilise them and they were immediately airlifted to Ondangwa and from there straight to 1Mil hospital in Pretoria.

There were two things that saved lives that day. The sharp actions of the well-trained medic "Shone" and the fact that the wire being used was a thin gauge rubberised claymore wire. We were issuing thick gauge naked copper wire at that stage (better comms). THAT wire would have killed them.

I went on orders in front of the Captain because I was hoping he would let me join one of the call signs and I could go out on patrol. He flatly refused *"Nee, Hickling. Ek het jou hier nodig"* (No, Hickling. I need you here.) He

had said in the past that I was the only one he could get comms with when he was in the field. I never thought he was that serious.

A bad thing happened that made me realise the importance of what I was doing. We had a section of bikes from SWASPES in Otavi. The section had left for patrol except for a corporal who couldn't start his bike. They were due to guard the Onathingie Bridge that night. Corporal Moya started his bike and took off chasing the patrol. Two things contributed to his death; he didn't have a headlight and the bike in front of him didn't have a taillight. They collided and Corporal Moya smashed his head against the tar. I was on signal duty that night when I heard a call barely above a whisper. *"Vier Zero Vier Zero Vier Een Charlie, Man erg beseer*"(Four Zero Four Zero Four One Charlie, Man badly hurt). "*Staanby"* (Standby) I told them. I sprinted to call the Captain. He got on the radio and started calling for a casevac chopper. He also sent the base ambulance out to the bridge. By the time the ambulance had got there he was dead. I felt really bad but there was nothing anyone could do. At least I'd picked up the call. It was then that I really realised the responsibility and importance of my job.

The Medics dropped his helmet and webbing off in the Ops room. The next day while manning my radios, a Corporal (Captains clerk) asked whose kit it was. I told him. He picked up the helmet and said, "You see this helmet. It belongs to a dead man!" I was already angry that someone had died. Revenge was close; blood from the helmet lining was running down his wrist like a fat red snake. He looked at his wrist, dropped the helmet and ran outside to puke. I think death still scared us and we weren't as brave as we thought.

I was cleaning out the generator cage one day. I was angry for some reason and the gate wouldn't close properly so I kicked it. I heard a growl behind me *"Hickling jy`s mos die burgermeester se seun en jy skop my hek, wat se jy?"* (Hickling you're the mayors son and you're kicking my gate. What do you say?) I profusely apologised. The Captain walked off. I was never going to live my status as a mayor's son down.

Greg's platoon had split from the rest of us and they had gone to "Messena" in the bushveld for their border phase. I though we'd found some semblance of normality without that madman. I was wrong, enter "Rocky"! He looked like Sylvester Stallone (the same hair and skin), and he was well built. He had a habit on greeting you, he would say *"Hello my ding"* (Hello my thing) and simply cut you with his *"Dankie tannie"* (Small Swiss army knife). I was covered in cuts from "Rocky`s" greetings. He thought it was a huge joke. "Basson" was such a gentle soul. We used to call him "Sister Basson." One day I spotted him walking around with a cauliflower ear similar to what rugby players have. I was really curious and I asked him. He told me nothing. After weeks of begging the truth came out. *"Rocky het my kraakbeen stukkend gebyt"* (Rocky has broken the cartilage in my ear by biting it). We were howling with laughter at poor "Basson's" misfortune.

"De Witt" had just come back from pass. He walked into the tent all excited and happy. *"Jou Cherrie le en sweet in `n ander man se arms,"* (You're girlfriend is lying sweating in another man's arms) I said. He went crazy. The reason he was so happy was that he'd just got engaged on pass - Poor sod!

"Beytendach," my accident-prone friend, had become our first real hero. He had jumped on a burning "Buffel"(Army APC) and rescued all the ammunition (some of it about to explode) and kit. The Captain was in contact with 53 Battalion about this brave deed, when the truth came out. "Beytendach" had been smoking on the vehicle and set the petrol canisters alight, the only thing he got for his bravery was a "Cubessak"

I had been getting signals about a small-scale operation called "VK51". One day a brown "Casspir"(Police APC) came rolling into camp. One white Lt and 4 black troops disembarked. The Lt was a very nice guy and the Black troops were very friendly. There was something very strange about this lot. "Hey Lieutenant," I asked him "Are your guys E.T`s?"(ex Terrs). I got the thousand-yard stare. I thought he was going to rip my eyes out and skull fuck me! Much later I was told these were the legendary "Recces" (Like the S.A.S). No wonder the man was so hostile. I luckily escaped with a dented ego and little else.

Bike Squad brought in a man that they had arrested. (We had martial law.) He was questioned by the intelligence section as we suspected him of being enemy. The next day a "Koevoet casspir"(Police anti terrorist branch) came into camp. They had a S.K.S rifle and boots and webbing with them. It transpired they were chasing him, and he had got rid of his uniform and rifle and carried on running in civilian clothes. He then ran into bike squad who had arrested him on suspicion.

This is where I really got respect for the Captain. He wouldn't send our guys out to look for this man's comrades. He instead handed this guy back to the Police. That night while queuing up for supper a "casspir" stopped outside the dining hall with a body draped over the bumper. There were four more bodies at the gate. The "Koevoet" had hit contact from the information given by the captured enemy soldier. It could have been us but I'm sure the Captain didn't want to put us in harm's way. This was reinforced later when one of our call signs had gotten fresh enemy spoor (tracks). They called into base and advised the Captain, he told them to withdraw and called the "Koevoet" in again. Again they hit contact; again it could have been us taking these risks.

If there was one thing that really got on the Captain's nerves it was Bike Squad "Popping Wheelies"-THIS WAS BANNED! One day we were sitting in conference, being in charge of the signal store at the time I had to attend. We heard the low rumble of the bikes returning from patrol when there was the distinctive sound of one bike revving and the rider "tapping" the throttle. *"Staf"* the Captain said. The staff took off like a fox terrier, only to return five minutes later with a face like a bloodhound. They just couldn't catch Bike Squad out!

One evening I was asleep on my bed when all hell broke loose. My bed was upended and someone was shouting at me. It was "Oosthuisen" from the next tent, in his drunken state; he thought I was sleeping in his bed. Not to fear, "Diff" was onto him like a cheap suit. "Diff" picked him up above his head and threw him onto the bed frame. There was lots of begging and pleading as "Diff" bundled him out of the tent. I had some really good friends.

We were becoming really bored by this time as the daily routine of border life began to work on our nerves. People were becoming careless with ammunition. I had a rifle grenade thrown at me. As I caught it, the fins cut

into my forearm. (I still have the scars). Bike Squad had to go one better. They were guarding "Onathingie bridge", one section (10 men) on either sides of the bridge. They were about 100-200 Meters apart. One of the ways to communicate at night was with the use of flares (1000 foot flares). It started when one flare was mistakenly fired low over the other position. A raging, "Flare battle" was soon taking place, these flares really used to move. I'm really surprised we didn't have any injuries.

There were some hard times up there, but soon time was running out and we were very close to that auspicious time in every National Serviceman's life; *"Klaar uit!"* The Bike platoon we had sent to "Rundu" base some 14 months before had returned to "*Klaar uit"* with us. This was the last time I had heard of that funny conductor bloke. One of the guys coming back from "Rundu" told me that "Bach" was still up to his tricks. At "Massena" he and "Buys" had stolen a motorbike and had gone AWOL, unfortunately they hit a hyena and they had been caught. According to my source they had both got D.B. (Detention Barracks). It looked like "Bach and Buys" were due to do more time in the army. Poor Guys. I was very grateful at this point that we hadn't lost anyone at all, we were going HOME! I think the Captain felt a small glow of pride too; if there was anyone who understood the real dangers of war it was *"Yati Spider"*.

I wonder if I didn't leave a part of myself behind on the sands of South West Africa. I knew I would never have an experience like this ever in life again.

AFTER THE SADF

After the army I met up with a few of the characters in these pages, Warren Soul (Still as wild as ever) and Mike Osterlaak (The Fischbach of bike squad). He nearly got me into trouble plenty. And there was Dave Mars (H.Q medic). I still think of many of my friends and wonder where they are and what they are doing today.

COMMENTARY

I feel that my time in the SADF was really a bittersweet experience. In two years I made some VERY good friends. I've suffered a lot and I've seen the good and bad in everyone. I've learned not to judge anyone, as I don't wear their shoes. I've seen the tragedy of war, and what it does to people. I've realised how much punishment I can take and still carry on. I'm not someone who is filled with hatred for my fellow man. I was simply caught up in a sad time in my fine country's history. I think, all in all, this experience has helped me instead of hurt me. With these thoughts I will take my leave of you, save for one comment. "INFANTRY - GO!"

Chapter Thirteen

Sapper's Delight
Jörg Kempka
21 Field Squadron, Bethlehem 1984 - 1985
Okankolo, Ondangwa

Hi my name is Jörg. Born and bred in Jo'burg in the good ol' suburb of Melville. I would like to share my experience as a troop in the SADF from 1984 – 1985.

I actually did not think about the reasons or why we were called up for National Service. I thought it's part of growing up and everybody you knew has done it, so I better do it.

I started receiving my call up papers in 1979, hence my army number starting with 79. I can't remember that number anymore. I was deferred three times, still in school or at tech. college was the reason. I always thought later I should have gone to that one, or that one, or Cape Town, or Pretoria (Yeah. Close to home!).

Anyway time came, January intake it was for Bethlehem 1984 in the sunny Freestate.

Preparation time: I don't think anyone was fully prepared to start their military training. Mentally and physically a challenge. The concept of purchasing a long chain with several pad locks (specially marketed by Viro) to lock your washing to the clothes line, really got me worried. As far as fitness goes. Prepared- NO. I still get the shakes thinking about it.

2 Field Engineers Regiment was going to be home for a while.

All packed and very nervous I arrived at Joburg showgrounds to be sorted and shipped out by train to Bethlehem.

The first taste of someone with stripes on his sleeve shouting and calling you names made me uneasy and more nervous. Saying goodbye to the folks and to my fiancée was hard. No more "*sleg* civvie" (comfortable civilian). The transformation had begun.

I can't remember much about the train ride down to Bethlehem, but I do remember our arrival. WOW! Lined up and indoctrinated.

"You are now government property and we can do whatever we want with our property to achieve what we want! Do you hear me?" JA KORPORAAL.

Haircuts and medical were first on the agenda. It's amazing how the same haircut (shave) makes everybody look the same. I think that's the idea. The medical went quick – there were a lot of bodies to process. I actually felt proud when they presented me with an ID card displaying G1 K1. Other guys got G2 K3 or G3 K2 etc. etc. Never really knew what that all stood for. G1 K1 as I later found out, meant license to *"af kak"* (suffer).

Kit issue was quite exciting. It felt like becoming part of something. I was average size so I had no problems fitting into stuff, but boy did the tall and the very short guys have a hard time!

I also remember clearly that same day we were introduced to leopard crawl. I don't think the scabs on the elbows healed for about 3 months.

Motto for every day. "Don't walk - Run! Hurry up and wait!"

2 Field regiment was main base. We were allocated to the outside camps 21 and 22 Field Squadrons respectively. My new home was 21 Field, and off we went to start Basic Training.

My first impression of the so called bungalows (barracks) was that they were going to be cold. It was confirmed in winter. Bethlehem is known to be the coldest place in southern Africa in winter. Just my luck!

Bravo platoon was going to be my family from now on. The most interesting thing at that stage was to find out how a mix of so many different types of people would cope as a unit. And by golly it did.

The biggest barrier being language. English – Afrikaans. But that disappeared soon.

A few items of interest were as follows:

Blisters. "Go see the medic". The quick and most effective treatment was to suck out the water with a syringe and needle and pump in some mercurochrome. It burned like hell, but it dried it out instantly.

Inspection. A new meaning to square. Everything had to be square. Socks, *balsak* (duffel bag) and bed edges etc. With a bit of starch, one could work wonders.

Bed rowing sessions. If your bed was not flat enough and had a bit of a hollow section to it, you were then requested to sit on the bed and start rowing with your rifle. While rowing your corporal would empty out a fire bucket of water over you and the bed. What a mess. I found that to be the most hilarious thing that happened in basics. You just could not keep a straight face when that happened to someone and subsequently everybody who did laugh, got the same treatment. I recall on one inspection the whole platoon jumped on their beds and started rowing as the corporals walked in. A classic!

Food. Lots of variations of the same thing I guess. My personal favourite (not); "pilchards in tomato sauce" served cold with scrambled rubber eggs? At 3.30 am. Enough said.

Midnight "training sessions". Commonly known as *'op vok'* sessions in the middle of the night involving a considerable amount of PT with full kit. Designed to build comradeship or teamwork by breaking you down mentally and physically. Nice.

I suppose everybody knows about fetching leaves off the constantly wrong tree? Well we had a 'pink pole'. Run to, around and back, altogether in a certain time, until you made that time.

Getting married. What a proud day it was. She was this oil soaked R1 rifle. '*This is your wife now, you will eat, sleep and do everything with her. And keep her clean at all times*.' The R1 sure shoots beautifully. I always enjoyed going shooting and just to brag a little, I was the first one in our platoon to receive *'skiet balkie'* (shooting medal).

2.4. Fitness test everyday. A 2.4 km run with full kit or as a team carrying poles. That training paid off big time in the months to come.

Mates at the shooting range, during basic training. Jorge is on the left.

First beer. I think we were allowed three beers after six weeks. It was amazing to see so called 'seasoned drinkers' as ourselves slurring our words after one or two beers.

Church on Sunday. Now that was an occasion. We got to dress up with all our badges etc. and strut into town. It was great just being able to sit still for ¾ hour. Most of us fell asleep. After church was time to indulge in civilian food and at the local 'take away' a vetkoek Dagwood was the best on the menu.

Second Phase Training. Now was time to train seriously and become a sapper. There was water purification, bridge building, demolitions, mine detection and bunker clearing to be learned. Always keeping in mind that we will be using this stuff on the border, kept us on our toes. This was all taught with utmost professionalism and the various instructors we encountered with their own field of expertise, was really amazing.

Now with the coloured 'balkie' under the engineer's insignia on our beret, we called ourselves trained field sappers. What a feeling, we had made it – all in one piece.

That meant we were ready for the border and that was scary. We did not know what to expect and heard all these stories. You could imagine how we felt.

Waiting on the tarmac at Bloemfontein Air Force base for our C130 Hercules (Flossie) was sure exciting. An uneventful flight brought us to Oshakati. The most noticeable was the climate change. The heat hit you like a brick wall. After 10 days orientation and training, we were shipped out to the outside camps to represent the SAEC and support various infantry units. The two units we did support were a commando unit from Cape Town and the Parabats. The time we spent with the bats was a chapter one could write a book about. Very interesting indeed.

The main tasks at Okankolo were to supply the camp with drinkable water which was pumped from a nearby *shona* (that's a depression in the ground that fills up with rain water in the rainy season). To stand guard and do a daily 30 kilometre mine sweep enroute to Ondangwa. The other 'kak' job was to build and maintain the French drains.

The camp was 'revved' (attacked) once with small calibre mortar. [There were] No injuries and little damage to the camp, but you should have seen the counter attack, it was overwhelming. Whatever we had, we fired towards the unseen enemy in the bush. This included mounted mags and 80 mm mortars. There was a big enquiry about it.

One day the Buffel convoy was ambushed on the return sweep. Some Swapo dude shot a RPG into one Buffel at close range, injuring one of our Parabat colleagues.

Christmas was the time one really missed family and friends, but we made the best of it and opened our *'dankie tanie'* packets.

So after a few months we enjoyed a long mid year pass back home and got ready for the second tour of duty.

We were back in Sector 10 after leave and found out they were looking for volunteer sappers for 101 Battalion. So as a group of nearly all the same guys as before, we volunteered, being based in Ondangwa. With two to three week long excursions into the bush and cross border operations, we saw and experienced the war from a different perspective, first hand in many situations. It was a real eye opener. A couple of good stories to be told, but we will keep those for another time and reminisce around a braai now and again.

The author (third from left) with 101 Battalion at Ondangwa.

The author (middle) on guard at the main gate at either Okalongo or Ondangwa.

As time went on, we started getting that '*min dae*' attitude. I think one gets a bit slack, which is not a good idea – but civvy life was calling. We departed back the same way we came. Did we make a difference? Has anything changed? Those questions we could only answer years later.

Passing out parade felt great. Even though we did not perform a final march due to weather, we marched up to receive our Pro Patria medal with pride. With the medal on our chest – the world belonged to us. What an experience – what a great day.

It was weird being a civvy again. I did not know what to do. There was no routine. There was no shouting. My wife said I was walking around at night, checking stuff!!

The hardest transition for me back to civilian life was when I started my apprenticeship. Here was I, the *'grensvegter'* being told what to do. That was a bit harsh on the system, but I got over it and managed with a good attitude. At least they gave us a year off our apprentice for doing national service.

I think it was a year after `*klaaring* out', that I received a call up for camps. The next place of interest was going to be Sasolburg Command. For a month every year for about five years we got to stand guard on various stragetic locations, patrol the area and my favourite – 'Bike Squad'.

Conscription was [eventually] abolished. I felt relieved and happy to end that chapter in my life. I am glad I did it and came out still in one piece. It made me stronger and more resilient, it armed me with something to cope with. And yet I am still to see the sense in what we did. Who won the war?

The commies are still around, Angola is still in a shambles. The ANC are ruling the country and Sam [Nujoma] is president of Namibia. Go figure.

Thank you for your time and letting me briefly share my experience. I would like to thank all the people and organizations that made it that little bit easier for us, and a big thanks to my folks for their and assistance (food, washing, ironing and for my dad for the late night drop offs at camp) And of course my beautiful wife who stood by me through thick and thin.

Engineers at Okalongo

Sasolburg Commando bike squad.

Chapter Fourteen

Leon Prinsloo
The Adventure of a Lifetime.
21 Field Squadron, Sector 10 and Operation *Packer*
1985 - 1986

It has been 21 years, but some things feel like yesterday, the smells and sound and sites stay forever. I suppose that if you hated it, it will not be too clear, if you enjoyed it and came out a better person, you tend to remember more. I am not even going to attempt to write down everything, there is too much. I am by no means a writer, so please excuse my grammar and other mistakes.

My Brother was PF[21] in Kroonstad; he was a Sergeant who trained JL's[22] at Vegkop and Bossies spruit. I got the following advice from him.

During basic training:

- never volunteer for anything.
- don't do anything that will make you stand out.
- don't be first and don't be last.
- if someone asks you if you want go to the border, say no because he will make you run to the border of the camp.
- if you really want to go to the border, do not go for JL's, becoming a corporal will reduce your changes of border duty significantly.

During second phase:

- pay attention and learn as much as possible, this info will help save your life.

On the border:

- use common sense and the training you received and you will most likely survive.

In January 1985 at the age of 17, I got on a train for Kroonstad with several hundred other young boys with the odd old man over 20. This, we were informed by the uniformed Corporals and Sergeants, was the start of 2 years of hell. And from the look on the faces of some of the boys you could see they were really scared. From Kroonstad we set off on another train for Bethlehem. I was to become a Sapper, and already proud of it.

Next stop is *"2 Veld Genie Regiment"* [2 Field Engineers Regiment] in Bethelehem. It takes a couple of days to get hair cuts, medicals and all your kit. After medical you get classed as G1K1 if you appear to be healthy and

[21] Permanent Force
[22] Junior Leaders, i.e. N.C.O. and officer trainees.

might survive basic training or G5K5 if they think you are of no use to the Army. After this we got divided into squads for placement in one of the three bases. Almost all the guys with medical conditions were to stay in 23 in town, the rest were sent either to 21 at the dam or 22 in the mountains. I was lucky enough to go to 21.

Basics at 21 Field Squadron, outside Bethlehem.

The corporals: "*Die Wit Tier*" [The White Tiger] - he would hide in the trees to spy on us and to check that all of us went round the pole or tree. There was this tall one that thought he was the MAN but he should have been a clown with Boswell's [Circus]. The others were not too bad and they were the ones that were respected. When practicing our marching skills for the big parade after basics, the tall clown shouted and screamed at me to straighten my arm. It was as straight as I could get it. He then ran up from behind and jumped on my back on top of my full kit. I just kept walking like nothing happened; after basics you are used to carrying a person around on your back, after about 30 paces he lost grip and jumped off. None of the Sergeants or Corporals said a word, and Bozo was quiet for a while. After three months of seeing this guy step on people to make himself feel important, I was ecstatic about openly defying his authority.

The Sergeants: "Lucifer" - he was definitely mad, he would walk around camp on Sunday in his underpants and a pair of gum boots. He was mostly fair, unless you pissed him off. I think his main concern was really that we survived if we went to the border. A couple of us got a lift with him to Kroonstad when we went on weekend pass. We were about to pass a bunch of kids on their way home from school, and one made as if he wanted to run in front of the car. He made an emergency stop, jumped out with the "sjambok"[23] and chased these poor kids through the "mielie land". He got back about 15 minutes later. Fortunately they got away. There was also this other really weird and sadistic Sergeant who fell out the bottom of his coffin on his funeral. Like I said, he was weird. Some of the Sergeants knew my brother and they promised him that they will make sure I get proper training; this meant no mercy. The one sergeant did not like my brother, so he gave it to me big time.

The Lieutenants the Captain and SM[24]: apart from one Lieutenant, I respected all of them and have nothing bad or weird to say about them.

The fat guy: he tried, but it was just not working out for him. The laziest guy, he got beaten up more than once. We would carry him face down between six of us, three on a side as we ran around *Pienk Paal*. [pink pole] The rest of the guys would hit him with their fists from below. I don't remember what happened to him.

Dirty Harry: After a couple of weeks we realized it was him and not the toilet that smelled like that. That night he got a free scrub on the parade ground, with cold water, Super Blue Surf and a couple of those hard bristled brooms. This must be one of the most humiliating things that can happen to you.

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[23] a kind of horse whip.
[24] Sergeant Major

The shortest guy, with his full kit on you can see only his boots, kit and *"staal dak"* [Steel helmet] from behind. He was the shortest but also one of the best guys to know.

Then there was the bottom of the pile, the snitches, the Corporal's pet. The clever guys, they always think they know everything. The thieves that would steal another person's belongings. Who would steal underwear, it just does not make sense.

Torture tools: *Pienk paal*, this is a tree stump that had been painted pink, it was located on the other side of a small valley. A favorite torture tool to be used for troepies that do not want to listen. Gypsy hill, this is a mean hill that would sometimes be incorporated into the MMI (*malle militere instelling*) or better known as the 2.4 kilometre run. The dam, Gerrands Dam, was another piece of nature that would be used to torture troepies.

Second Phase

At some time after second phase started we moved from 21 to 22 Field Squadron where the shooting range, as well as *"Piet se Gat"* [Pete's hole] is located. During second phase we learned about explosives, land mines, mine sweeping, water purification, bridge building, all the different weapons and a couple of other things. To any technically minded person who likes things that make a bang, this was a very interesting time.

I think it was August when we went to Soweto for a month. This was an experience that changed my life and my view of the then current events forever.

Cheesecake: this name will invoke a grin from most people that knew him, unless you were a person with rank at the time; then you might start crying. It is possible that he is still doing extra time for all his infractions of the military law. He had the most unique way of doing a pushup; it was nothing more than the slow up and down movement of his head. I saw this guy getting a Sergeant to almost burst into tears. Standing in a squad, the sergeant spoke to Cheesecake and he ignored the sergeant. The sergeant asked him, *"Dink jy ek is fokken skeel?"* meaning `Do you think I am cockeyed?' Of course Cheesecake answered, "Yes, Sergeant, did you not know this?" (He really was!) The Sergeant went into an uncontrollable rage and invented a whole dictionary of swear words and phrases that were new to us. Cheesecake started laughing at the Sergeant, who then asked him "What are you laughing at?" Cheesecake answered; "When you get that angry, your ears go like this," and he motioned with both hands cupped behind his ears moving them backwards and forwards like an elephant. The whole squad burst out laughing. The Sergeant was absent for a few days after that. At the end of second phase we held what they called `Regimental Practice'. This was to practice most of what we learned before going to the Border. During this event Cheesecake got hungry and stole the RSM's ratpack. That was the last time I saw him.

This signaled the end of second phase, we went home and were to report back after seven days. The lucky guys got to go to the border, and the rest stayed behind in the good old SA.

Second Phase training:

The top two photos show before and after a South African No.8 landmine was detonated beneath this Cressida.

An army boot is filled with sand and dropped on an anti-personnel mine.

Shooting a crater. The pictures were taken from 2000 metres away, and the hole created by this was unreal.

Border Duty - Sector 10

After landing at Ondangwa, on 11 November 1985, the door of the *Flossie*[25] opened to reveal an intense bright light. The reflection of the sun on the white sand was shocking after sitting in the dark *Flossie* for such a long time. The midday heat was unbearable. We had to get on the back of open Kwe 100's (big truck with armoured cabin). There were a few tyres lying on the back and we were instructed to sit on them. Lying in the SWA sun the whole morning soaking up the sun, the temperature of the rubber was very high (sic). Everyone sat and about five seconds later we were all standing rubbing our butts. The *Oumanne*,[26] of course, thought this was hilarious! The trip to Oshikati went as well as can be expected on the back of a truck in that heat. Arriving at 25 Field Squadron, we were off-loaded and taken to tents at the western side of the camp.

About 20h00 that night the local defenders of the town decided to have same fun and let rip with a .50 in the guard tower just outside the camp. Instant panic! Corporals and *Oumanne* running into the tents shouting "*Gate toe, ons word gerev!*" meaning, to the holes we are being attacked. The problem was, we had no holes to go to. Then they started shouting "*Waar is jou fokken staal dak, rower*?" meaning; `Where is your F*****g helmet, newbie?' They had their fun for about ten minutes, and then after we all calmed down and made sure there was no bodies lying around, they started talking to us about the do's and don'ts of border duty. And they wanted to know what the women in the states looked like, because they had forgotten. Would we become like this? Never!

After a day or two, we were divided into groups again to go to the outside bases. I was going to Elundu. If you are a Sapper this is how it works; each outside base gets two sections and a Corporal - a section is 10 guys. We stay at one base while Infantry, Bats, SAKK and other units move from base to base every 4 to 6 weeks. We would be at Elundu from November 1985 to August 1986. Our main duties would be water purification, and mine sweeping for the convoys that take provisions from Eenhana to Nkongo.

Elundu

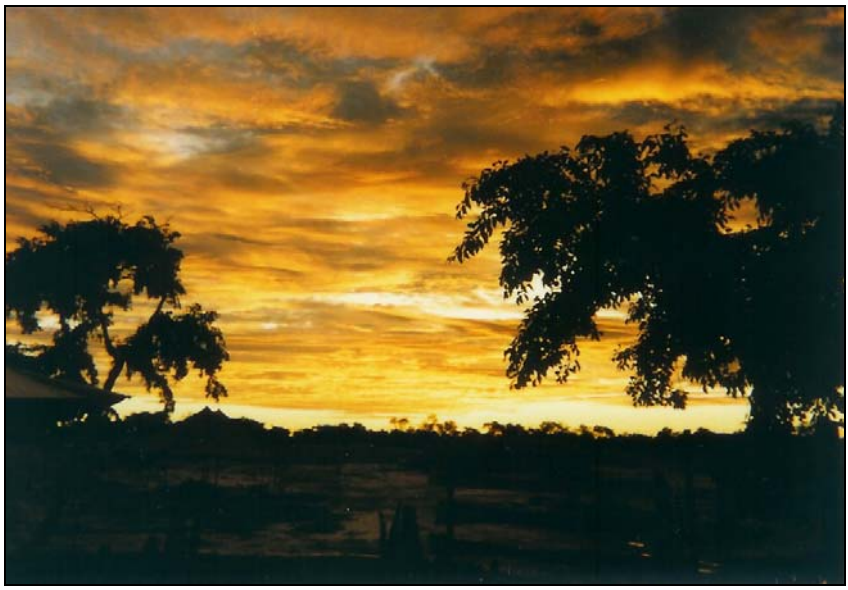
Transport to Elundu was by Buffel, armoured anti-landmine personnel carrier. It was designed to take a section, 10 guys and a driver. You must sit and you must strap yourself in with the safety belts. Arriving at Elundu, the *Oumanne* were waiting for their relief. There was a hand over, and off they went. They were going home and had no time to pull any pranks on us. The next day it all started to sink in; around you is bush and white sand. Because it is rainy season, the vegetation is green. If you arrive there during the dry season, it would be an ugly place. We had no Corporal for the first month or so, and there were no Section Leaders between the two sections. Amazingly, we all just went with the flow and it did not matter that we had no leader. We managed quite well on our own. We got a Corporal later on; he was a small

[25] slang: nickname for the C-130 and C-160 transport aircraft that flew troops to and from the operational area.

[26] Afrikaans: literally, 'old men' but a term used to describe veteran soldiers.

skinny guy who did his job. We called him "Spookie" meaning, `small ghost', because he was very white and small, like Casper the Friendly Ghost.

This is how I remember Elundu, awesome.



Sunset at Elundu.

Sappers' Valley was the name of our part of the base. This included two tents and the water purification area consisting of pumps and 'S' tanks. We would pump water from the shona (small natural dam) just north of the base, into the 'S' tanks, purify the water and pump it into the water tanks for use by the rest of the base.

Above and overleaf: Sappers Valley, pictures taken from on top of water tank.

The shona just north of the base.

There was a Chopper pad on the west end of the base. Gunships would come and go on a regular basis for various reasons, either to fill up with fuel, pick up 20 mm ammo, and drop off or pick up casevacs.[27]

A Puma helicopter on the chopper pad at Elundu.

Mine sweeping, is probably the main reason for Sappers to go to the Border. We would walk the road half way to Nkongo (about 40 kilometres) once a week and half way to Eenhana (about 14 kilometres) twice a week. We met the guys from the other base halfway and turned back. We would alternate between the two sections, one week you do Nkongo and the next week is Eenhana. It works like this; five guys at a time walking in a diagonal line across the tracks. You would walk with mine detectors and your R 4 rifle. Infantry provides cover by walking alongside the road on both sides. The mine detector weighs about the same as a R 4 loaded with a full magazine. The trick is to get the mine detector balanced in your hand so that you don't have to grip it tight or need to apply force to lift the front or rear. After several months, the team gets the hang of this, and the walking becomes much easier. If you get into the rhythm, it is amazing how fast you can go. If I remember correctly, our best time on a seven kilometre stretch was 30 minutes. I found that carrying your R 4 in the other hand balances your body nicely and makes for a comfortable walk. I enjoyed the walking and always competed with the guys giving protection; the closest competition came from one of the infantry guys from 7 SAI (I think). One time we walked away from the rest of the guys by about a kilometre. For some reason we did not get into trouble for this.

For about 32 kilometres the road was straight as an arrow, see the pictures overleaf. The surface was compacted very hard and any person who wants to dig a hole for a landmine should bring a jackhammer. The colour changed from red to white, and the reflection of the sun off the white surface was extremely bothersome.

At the Nkongo halfway point we would usually find some donkeys feeding and they would provide lots of fun while waiting for the team from Nkongo to arrive. First challenge was to catch one, then to get on, then you must get this animal to move and once it starts moving it is rodeo time! The

[27] casualty evacuations.

longest ride would result in approving cheers from the spectators. As with all sports, this one had injuries as well. I held on too long one day and the donkey ran through a thorn bush, with me on his back. All I can say is; `Do not try this at home!'

One of the mine sweeping teams in action.

Halfway point, where we met the guys from Nkongo.

Frustration was, when you were walking and Koevoet came roaring past in their Casspirs. Even though we could all see them going down the road we still had to sweep it. A couple of times we just jumped on the Buffels and took off after them. You just had to hope that the "Bosbok" spotter plane did not come over and catch you out. We never found a mine on either road in the nine months we were there.

On one occasion we swept the road to Eenhana and had to wait for four hours for the other team to arrive. On arrival, we saw the Infantry Platoon commander, a Lieutenant, was new and fresh out of the States, and he stopped for every small little thing that looked "suspicious". One of those guys that cannot use common sense and has to follow the book, word for word. Pottie, a fellow Sapper, who was quite big and had a full beard, came down on this

poor Lieutenant and scared the crap out of him, promising him that he will do all sorts of nasty things to him if he ever made us wait like that again. The Platoon Commander with us chose to say nothing because he was just as angry at having had to wait. Later on I would realize that it was incidents like these that kept us going, because for the next two weeks we had something to joke about and laughter was the one thing that kept us sane.

During our time at Elundu there were two SA infantry platoons, 7 and 1 as well as Bats,[28] SAKK,[29] 911 Battalion, and Venda who come to provide protection. Each one of these had there own way of doing things. It was mostly uneventful apart from the entertainment supplied by some of the more colorful characters that are always part of every group.

The Commanding Officer and second in command from 7 SAI took pleasure in handing out corrective training to the Sappers, after the second incident we went out of our way to give them reason. Then we would see who can get either one of them to crack first. This turned out to be great fun. It ended after the second in command fell from the bin of a Buffel. That's more than a two metre drop. In a cloud of dust, he jumped up and that was the end of it; maybe the knock on his head made him come to his senses.

SAKK would start drinking and then things start getting scary. One of the Sappers managed to get them angry at us one night and being outnumbered 200 to about 20, we were standing guard that night with our backs to the bushes.

101 Battalion OM

Within 101 Battalion there was the well known "Romeo Mike" *Reaksie Mag* (Reaction Force) and also the less known "Oscar Mike" *Opvolg Mag* (Follow up Force). From time to time, these guys would stop by the base for supplies. During a visit from OM in February 1985, my life changed dramatically. The Platoon Leader was a Staff Sergeant and he needed a Sapper to go with him. I jumped at the opportunity and volunteered before he could finish the explanation. This turned out to be the best decision I made in the two years. This started a good working relationship, and I went out with them several times for two to three weeks at a time. This is the kind of experience that you cannot equal; these guys were the real thing! There were only three white guys; the Staff Sergeant, the Medic and myself. He had a white Alsatian named Alaska; this dog was the best trained and disciplined dog I have ever seen. The bond between them was extremely strong.

OM was used, amongst other things, to follow up on specific information. This would take us to various places and situations; we went from one side of Ovamboland to the other and into Angola. The Staff Sergeant had taken part in Ops *Protea* and one time, when we were close to that area, he took us to where the two bases Moscow and Vietnam were. There were still some trenches and underground bunkers visible.

On several occasions I joined in chasing spoor. Those people who have done this will know the feeling, the only way to describe it is `extreme adrenalin rush'! The skill of the trackers is unbelievable! They are very good!

[28] Abbreviation for 'Parabats', or Parachute Battalion troops.
[29] *Siud Afrikaanse Kleurling Korps,* or South African Coloured Corps.

The Alsatian called Alaska.

The system they used worked very well and once a spoor was identified, the perpetrator was run down with a success rate of about fifty percent. One or two guys would run on the spoor with the Command Buffel, with a .50 Browning machine gun, close behind. One Buffel either side and slightly forward, and the other two would go either left or right for about 500 metres and then forward as fast as possible for one to two kilometres and then cut across to try and find the spoor. If they were lucky and found something they would radio back and the tracker would jump on the Buffel and advance to where the spoor was picked up. This leap-frogging would be repeated as long the spoor was clearly visible. No person on foot can out-run this system. Rain would be one of the few things that could save them.

To flush out the enemy, I would detonate four kilograms of PE 4. We would make a lot of noise and take off at high speed. The next day we would return to see if there were any curious terrorists in the area, who had come to investigate the explosion. Much to my surprise, this actually worked on several occasions. We would have a cooking fire every night, and some nights we would shoot a fire plan with the .50, 60mm patmor[30] and small rifles. Some of the mortars did not detonate in the soft sand, and obviously I would have to dig them out of the sand and destroy them with a candle (225 grams) of PE 4. Once again I was amazed by the ability of these soldiers to find these unexploded mortars the next day. You didn't see them because they went into the soft sand, sometimes up to half a metre deep. We did not leave until all of them were accounted for.

Occasionally we would meet up with Koevoet. This proved to be another opportunity for me, because I was borrowed by them a few times. After working with Koevoet as well, I considered myself to have seen almost everything there was to see during Bush warfare. I was surprised by the discipline shown by Koevoet; a short parade each morning for prayer and to keep everyone informed of the plans for the day, and even though there was

[30] patrol mortar.

rank, it was not used to look down or to belittle others. Respect was shown to each and every person that deserved it, unlike the SADF. That is probably why they were so effective.

Take an Alouette helicopter, mount a 20mm cannon and put a skilled gunner behind it and you have a Gunship. I saw them in action a few times and believe me if I tell you that you do not want them coming for you. They would work together in pairs, flying in a circle opposite each other above the target, and shooting down, pinning the target down where they found him. Needless to say that hiding behind a tree when the other guy has a 20mil with HE rounds does not really help. The results could be quite gruesome on some occasions.

An abandoned farmhouse, encountered on patrol.

A kraal, where members of the local population lived.

Eventually it was August and time to go home for a 21 day pass.

This was the first time in my life that I felt that I was leaving home, and I could not wait to get back. At this stage I was seriously considering joining Koevoet or SWA TF. Fortunately that was not going to happen. Maybe if it became a job it would not have been a really cool adventure.

25 Field Squadron: Oshakati

The 21 Days back in RSA was quite boring and nice at the same time. I had no problem adjusting back to normal life for the duration of the pass. When it was time to go back, I was well rested and looked forward to a further four months at Elundu.

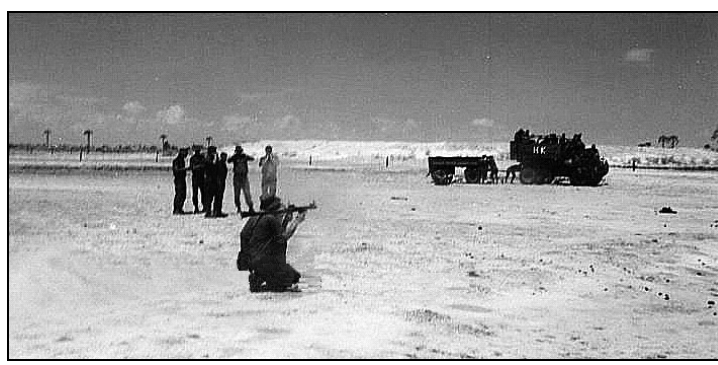
We reported back to Doringkloof from where we flew to Ondangwa and travelled by road to Oshakati. Over the next couple of days all the guys would come in and we would have some time to catch up on who did what over the past three weeks. Some of the stories where hard to believe and others sounded like the guys had a really good time.

Then the bad news came! I was not going back to Elundu. I was staying in Oshakati at 25 Field Squadron. What a shock! To stay in a big base in a town is not my idea of fun. Suddenly there are rules to follow, no more living in a tent, no more doing what you want when you want. This sucked! As Sappers, we were spoiled in some of the outside bases. We really had a good time and in most cases we were left alone as long as we did our job and did not break the rules. I would mostly miss the times that I went out with other units, because those were the times when I got what I saw as `the real experience'.

25 Field Squadron turned out to be not as bad as I thought it would be. Close to the base was a SAWI store, so we could buy most things that are available back home in the States. The base had a nice pool and they even had a TV. I got to meet up with some old friends and made some new ones. There were some advantages in Oshakati that we did not have in Elundu, so I made peace with the place and started to enjoy it.

Then it became time to get back to work. Mine sweeping here was different from what I was used to. We would go in the morning and sweep a short piece of road at a school or college. Protection was provided by NODDY cars (or `Eland' as they are officially known.) This was actually very boring, because you would drive on a sealed road for up to an hour to check 500 metres of dirt road. This became one of the things I disliked most about Oshakati.

From time to time we would go to the shooting range outside town and do some shooting with a variety of weapons. My all time favorite is the RPG 7. It is incredibly loud and very effective if used correctly. It is in the same class as the AK47 in the sense that it stood the test of time and is still widely used today. The biggest drawback is the back blast it creates when it is fired. The RPG 7 can be seen being fired in the picture taken at Oshakati, below.



Eventually we started going on what was called a "*Myn Jag*", or mine hunt. The platoon would go out for a week or two at a time and follow up on information about possible ammo caches in and near Sector 10. This turned out to be great fun. I was to spend time in the bush again, lots of mine sweeping, seeing new places, visiting a lot of the bases in Sector 10. Some of the names I can remember; Ombalantu, Mahnene, Ruacana, Omungalumwe, Okongo, Alpha Tower, and other bases of which I can not remember the names.

It would all start with us getting the orders saying that we will be going out in a day or two. We would then start preparing and making arrangements for food, and have the Buffels checked. Food is in the form of ration packs or " rat packs " as they are affectionately referred to. Fortunately, one of the guys in the section had a brother working as a chef, so we would get all kinds of stuff to take along; potatoes, onions, tomatoes, cheese, cooking oil, canned sausages and meat, bread, rusks, condensed milk, long life milk and more. On some outings I think we ate better than the guys at base!

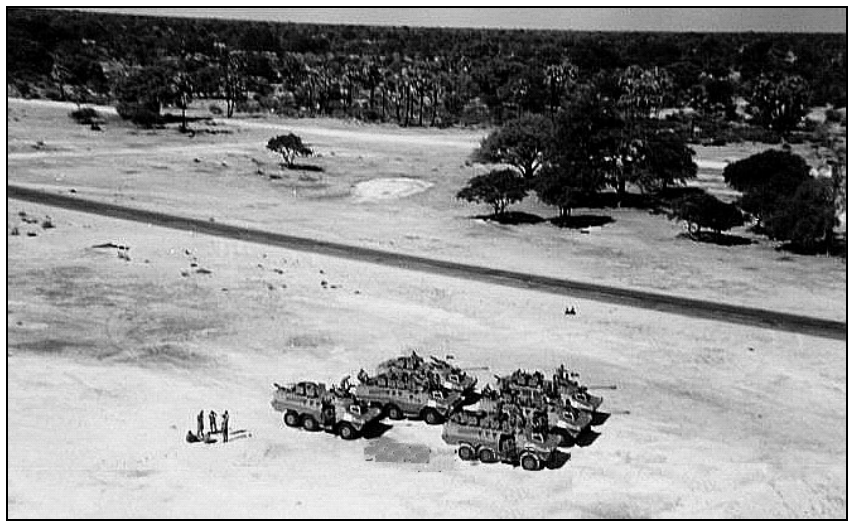
We would make sure that all our personal kit was in order and on the morning that we moved out, the last stop was the magazine to get extra ammo and other weapons. This consisted of a 7.62mm LMG and a 40mm grenade launcher for each Section, we would also get an RPG 7, trip flares and claymore mines.

On one occasion we were in the process of drawing weapons when the new store man was playing with a detonator that had been removed from a fragmentation grenade. Several of us told him to put it down, but he was a real "GV" and would not listen. Then came the bang, followed by the scream, two fingers missing. Well, we warned him!

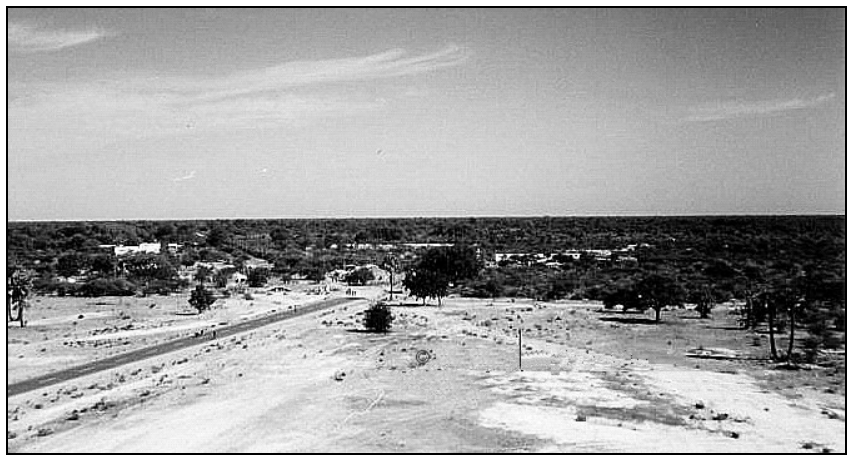
One of the most interesting mine hunts was in the Ruacana area. We went North along the Kunene river. It is a really nice place. Suddenly there is a huge river and mountains, compared to the flatness and dryness of Ovamboland. This was almost heaven. As much water as you can use! You will see in the following pictures that we did make use of it as much as we could. There was always the reality that there are crocodiles in the river, so we kept an eye out for them at all times, or shall I say most of the time.

One day we are walking in one of the countless waterways when the most arrogant guy in the section stepped in between two rocks and his foot got stuck. He was totally convinced that he was being attacked by a croc, so when he shouted `crocodile!' we all got out of the water before he finished the word. He was very angry at all of us because no one wanted to help him and we were all thinking of ourselves only.

The other outings could not really compare to this one at Ruacana. On our way back, we stopped for one night at the Army base and we slept in the Sappers' area. They were in the process of installing or repairing the pool, but it could be used, so that night we relaxed in the pool with a couple of beers. The suction pipe from the pump was lying loose in the pool. It did not take Smiley (the section clown) long to try and use this pipe to provide himself with some under belt action. Then suddenly he stopped smiling and could not get a word out. One of the guys was quick to add two and two and jumped out to switch off the pump. Smiley got his jewels stuck in the suction pipe. Nothing sucks like a Suba pump! Ask Smiley, he knows!



Pictures taken from Alpha Tower, which provided water for the surrounding area. This view is to the west. Note the Ratels in the foreground.

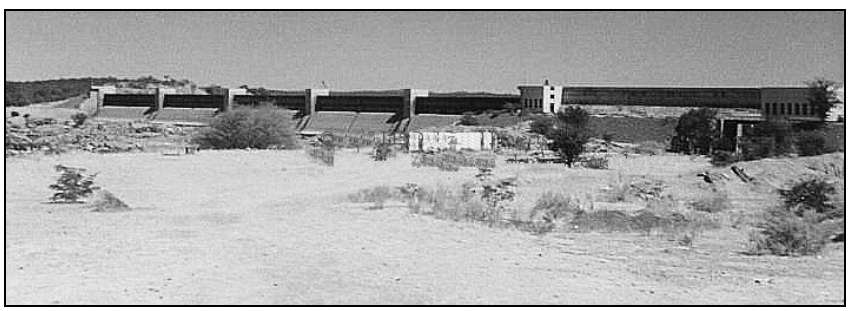


Just north of the tower the sealed road ended at the border line.

Looking towards the south.

In the Ruacana area, wading through water everywhere.

Filling the Buffel's water tank from a shona.



Ruacana Dam wall.

On the weekend of the Currie Cup final in 1986, we were on a mine hunt again and somehow three goats found their way into the back of the Buffels bin. We stopped for the night at an old base, Omungalumwe. It was used by some units in the SWA territorial force. There were some shops in the area that sold alcohol. Not a large variety, but they had enough for us. You can choose between Old Brown Sherry and Cane Spirit. We were all in agreement that it would be much more effective if you take one of each. So that is what we did.

We stopped early that day so that we could get the goats prepared and get ready for the rugby, which we would listen to on the radio. The goats were slaughtered and the firewood was collected, so we started drinking. It did not take long for us to forget about the rugby and we started the fires so we could braai (BBQ) the goats. Sherry and Cane is not a good combination, and goats are not meant to be cooked over a really hot fire. Nonetheless, we still had fun that night! The next morning no one knew what the rugby score was.

The whole day Smiley would scratch his back vigorously against any hard object, at about noon he took his shirt off and found that one of those big hairy worms had found its way into his shirt. He had the itch until we got back to base a couple of days later.

Another time that stood out was when we stopped over at one of the bases for the night and got into a huge brawl with the Parabats who were at the base. For some reason, they and us did not mix.

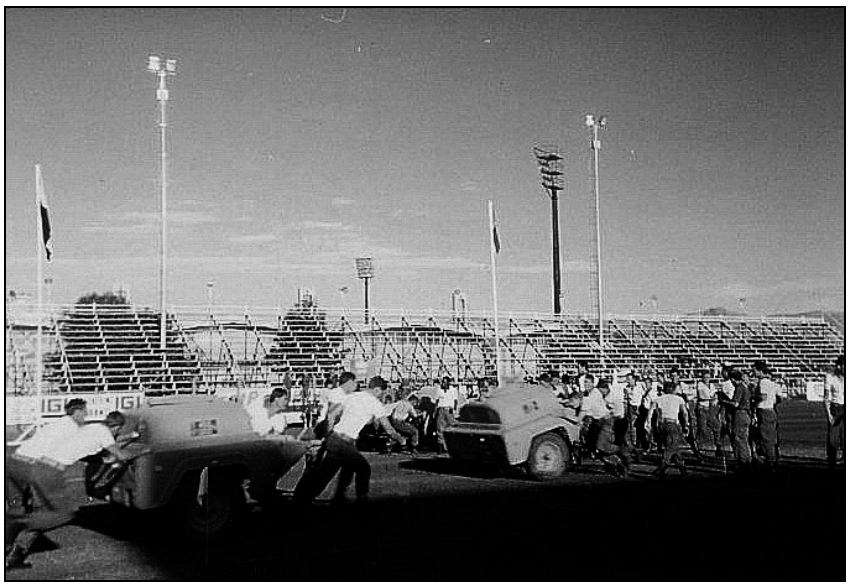
One particular experience stands out as being very unpleasant. We were on a routine mine hunt and got new orders saying that we had to go to a certain location and wait there until further notice. When we got there, there were some other units including Recces, 101 Battalion and Koevoet. I ran into one of the guys I had worked with earlier in the year while working with OM.

The Lieutenant got his new orders and we were off to the new location. We were told that some sort of operation was going to happen and we were supposed to set up an ambush to stop any runaways that came our way. We did not have enough water with us, so we had to drink from the shona close by. We could not make fire to boil the water, so we had to use it as is. It was used by the locals and their animals, so we thought; `If they can use it so can we.'

We all got really sick from it and we still had to wait in that location until further notice. The medic's supplies did not include stuff that could help us. After several days of agony, we got the word that we could move out. We set some new records getting to the closest base to get some medication and clean water! You do not realise how important water is until you have to go without it.

We also got to go to Windhoek to represent the Engineering Corps in a type of games event were you would jump over walls, pull water carts and do all kinds of silly stuff.

It was fun because we got to go into the city a couple of nights. We made a big dent in the local supply of Windhoek Lager. The old rivalry between Sappers and Parabats resulted in a few good fist fights again.



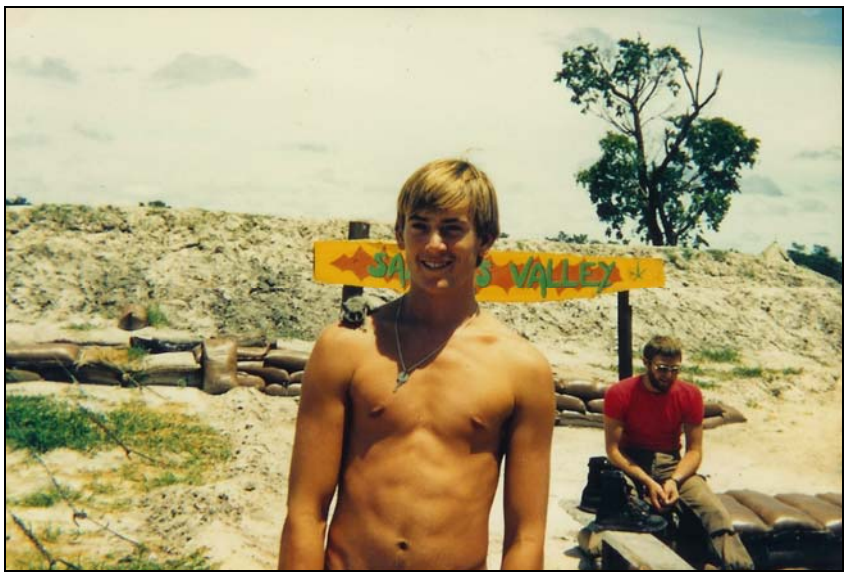
Pulling water carts in the games event in Windhoek.

Then it became time to go home and resume our normal lives, the two years was coming to a close. Preparations were made for us to return to Bethlehem. All the rules of what could go back and what could not go back was explained several times and yet some guys did not listen. One guy was caught with a R4 rifle magazine full of rounds. Another was caught with a Bushbaby (small nocturnal animal). There was a few others caught with all sort of stuff that was not allowed back.

The flight back was in a Boeing and was very pleasant compared to the normal Flossie flights that we got used to. We spend about a week back in Bethlehem before we finally got to go home. The leadership in the base where we stayed was dysfunctional and it turned out to be a very bad end to what I personally saw as a very uplifting and good experience.

My biggest criticism of the SADF would have to be the way they choose their leaders, and the lack of decency in most of them. I saw some of them that should be locked up because they are mentally ill, and yet they are put in charge of young people who are thrown into a war. I did meet some leaders, mostly career soldiers that were respectable and good people that did not need to step on smaller people to inflate their own egos.

I am one of the lucky ones. I went back to a job and just carried on with my life. I choose to forget the negative and just held on to the good things I learned. As time goes on I would have less and less contact with the guys I met in the Army; we did not really have anything in common anymore.



Leon Prinsloo at Sappers Valley, Elundu.

Chapter Fifteen

Roy Mansfield♣
South African School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn
1986 - 1987

Roy completed his training as a teacher before reporting for National Service at School of Infantry, Oudtshoorn in January 1986. He remained as an instructor there in 1987, after having fetched a group of Officer and NCO training applicants from 5 SAI (Ladysmith).

Expectations Prior To Reporting

I was quite fortunate in many ways that I'd done varsity, and I'd done the HDE so I was a teacher. Before that, all those interim callups that you get before you finally say; `Okay, I'm coming', had been to infantry camps - SAI *plaases*, as we called them. (Roy: Was this by any chance a pun on `saai' as in `to sew seed'?) Most were for Grahamstown, some were for Ladysmith, and I even had one to the Marines at one of the Naval bases down in the Cape. When I finally said; `Right, I'm ready to come now, and I let them know that I had done the HDE, I was automatically called up directly to Oudtshoorn. I knew that it was the Infantry School, we would be going on officers course, and because of that it was a whole year's training, rather than just six months basics that the ordinary infantry soldier would have. It was worth it in the end from what we had heard. We had heard that it was tough, but that you were treated more humanely than you would have been at the average SAI-*plaas*, because we were meant to be officer material. Generally we counted ourselves lucky to be in that situation, remembering that we had quite a few guys who did their HDE with us when it was a very real and - possibly threatening like I guess military service was to everybody. A looming thing on the horizon at the end of our HDE year. There were guys who had been with us who said that they knew that the guys who went off to Infantry school suffered for a year and then they had it cushy for another year. I could say that I knew what was coming to some extent. To some extent that allayed the fear of the unknown of what was coming up.

I had very ambivalent feelings towards it. To some extent I saw it as a right of passage, to some extent a necessary evil, to some extent `you do your duty to your country', to some extent the conflict was about disadvantaged people wanting to assert what they felt were their rights. It was a thing that came back to me several times while I was doing my national service. I went in with some apprehension. It never occurred to me that I should run away to England as one or two of the guys that I was at university with did. To some extent they were seen as traitors to some extent at that stage still. I think that

♣ a pseudonym; the author's name has been withheld at his request.

the propaganda machine had been very effective in portraying people like the `End Conscription Campaign' as being almost communists; as part of the *`Rooi Gevaar, Swart Gevaar'* sort of thing. To some extent one went into it feeling; `I'm not sure that its necessarily the right thing, but it was the lesser of who knows how many evils.' Everybody else was doing it, so you would go and do your bit for the country. I also have a brother who had been through it straight after school; he had gone to Kimberley to Intelligence. He had a particularly rough time. I knew that it was an organisation that didn't take kindly to people who buck the system, but he certainly didn't cope with the system. When they listened to what he was saying and allowed him to contribute what he felt he could contribute, he was very successful at doing just that. I had this in the back of my mind as well. I was fortified by knowing that going down to Oudtshoorn, I knew what was coming.

Last Ten Days

I spent as much time as possibly with family and friends and Vivien (then girlfriend, now wife). I remember us spending almost all of our time together, apart from saying goodnight at about twelve o'clock at night, and seeing Vivien as early as possible again the next morning. There was a lot of preparation in getting all the kit and katunda and the irons and everything ready, speaking to people who had been through it before and saying, where they had some item of required kit on the list; saying; `Don't worry to take that. Take this, or don't take ten of those. Take fifteen of those because you are going to need them. It was that sort of preparation. I don't remember being particularly nervous through those last few days. I was enjoying myself. It was a case of making the most of the time I had left. I remember trying to make an effort to get fit in advance, and I know from what transpired when I got to Oudtshoorn that I wasn't as fit as I could have been, but I wasn't nearly as unfit as some of the guys who got there. I was in reasonably good shape. I woke up in the morning knowing that maybe I should go for a run, but I would far rather spend the time doing something else, so I didn't get too excited trying to get super-fit. The impression we got was that whether you were fit or not, everybody was going to be made fit if you were capable of that, so it didn't concern me too much.

The Journey

We reported to the drill hall in Pietermaritzburg. I remember that being quite a tense time. We had been warned that although we were going to Oudtshoorn, we would be travelling with other guys who were going to be dumped off at Ladysmith, and we weren't too sure what lay in store for us from that point of view. I think that the feeling amongst the guys that I was travelling with was that when we got to Oudtshoorn, things would be quite rational as far as they could be, but that there could be some up-hill before that. I can remember lining up and seeing the guys from varsity, the guys that I was used to mixing with, and also seeing a whole lot of young *laaitjies*. I remember saying a tearful `goodbye' to Vivien and family, and then going to stand in long lines where they did an inspection of our kit. They just walked up to some guys randomly and said; `Unpack all your kit', other guys they just said unpack this bag, other guys they just asked; `have you got anything with you?' and would check your papers. They didn't have the time to go

through everyone with a fine-tooth comb, but we were told that booze and drugs and anything like that would be frowned upon heavily and would be a big no-no! Not a good way to start off your national service. I think that's when it actually hit me. I remember my mom making a nice big fancy supper, and I think that we had to be there at seven o'clock that night or something along those lines. That day wasn't a particularly pleasant day, but it wasn't an unpleasant day. I just remember being somewhat apprehensive about everything. I was prepared from a kit point of view. The worst was getting to the drill hall, and that was when you realised; `Now! You're off!'

The journey worked out to be two and three quarter days. I remember we spent at least two nights on the train. We stopped off at just about every possible stop along the way. Essentially - there were some private individuals on the train - it was the train that eventually became the Trans-Karoo. There were some private people on board, but we were told to keep totally separate from them. One or two of the guys ended up sneaking off to the dining carriage and chatting with the civvies, but we had been told to keep clear of the civvies. I can remember that when we arrived at the stations in-between there were guys getting on to the train who were off to national service as well. I remember thinking that they were lucky that their parents could be there because it was a small station and they could see them off , whereas our parents weren't allowed to go to the station. When we stopped at a station, everybody who was on the train to go and do national service had to close the curtains so that the ANC or the terrorists couldn't count how many boys were off to go and do national service. That was what we were told. I think it was more a case of not wanting us leaning out of the windows, and having some guys being obnoxious to civvies.

My feeling was `Keep your nose clean. Stay out of the pooh!' That was the best way to cope with it. That was the message that I got from (my brother) Richard and everybody else. Don't be seen to stand out. It didn't pay to be super-fit. Be in the middle third. The bottom end of the top third, the top of the middle third was a good place to be for anything, because then you were away from the bottom half and behaving yourself. Don't rock the boat. I was very much aware of; `You do this. It might not make any sense to you, but that is the way to survive.' I ended up in a carriage with five guys who had done their HDE with me, which was very nice. Two or three of them were guys who I had been at school with. One I had been at school with had always been `arty', he was very good at dramatics and so on, and I remember while I was travelling with him that he was very nervous. I was quite concerned about him. He didn't eat any of the food that was provided. He had brought his own, but I can remember him eating very little. He wasn't a particularly fit guy at school. He was always on the chubby side. I remember him having lost a lot of weight in the build up to the whole thing; him having been apprehensive in the HDE, and mentioning it. The sixth member of the compartment was a chap by the name of Pieter De Beer. I ended up in the platoon with him, after their platoon was disbanded when they started rationalising things as guys were withdrawn or withdrew themselves from the course. I can remember him making our trip an absolute nightmare because he had smuggled alcohol on to the train. He was a Durbanite, and he got on the train at Ladysmith, I think because his girlfriend was at Ladysmith. He got on with alcohol, having had

enough alcohol so that having a few more beers would get him drunk. He wasn't under the influence enough for it to be noticeable for the guys to send him off home because he was drunk, as they would do under those circumstances. We expected him to get locked up, and that the military police would step in. I can remember him being totally obnoxious. All five of the rest of us were just wanting to get this over and done with, to keep our noses clean and let the two years pass as soon as possible. He was from an Afrikaans background and all the rest of us were from English backgrounds, and he was a real cocky arrogant swine, and he knew so many people and he could make life comfortable; `*Ag*, man! Have a beer with me!' and we were saying; `No, we don't want a beer with you.' Inevitably he got to the point where one of the corporals came and I can still remember this corporal storming in and this guy made a nervous giggle and stood to attention and because he knew that this was the way to react. One or two of us, because we were on our bunks or somewhere did not jump to attention, and we were severely reprimanded by this guy and him just standing there with a sock grin on his face when the corporal couldn't see it, and us just wanting to throw him out of the train carriage of we could, and him getting away with it. Eventually it got to the point where the guy came in and confiscated the booze from him, but they searched all of us, and it wasn't comfortable, because they said; `We're watching you. You're marked. We'll get you down there.' What we didn't realise at the time was that they were just transit NCOs and a transit officer, to fetch and carry, and they came from some reception battalion down in Durban, and this was just their way of keeping everybody in line. You realise that afterwards and have a good chuckle about it, but at the time I remember it being quite worrisome. I remember the continuous journey, and us just sitting there with nothing really to talk about, other than what we had left behind. Did we have enough stuff with us? I wonder what it's going to be like there. I can remember the guy that I spoke about earlier being very very nervous. He was almost a recluse, and yet we were quite friendly with him at school, and doing HDE. He was cause for concern as far as I was concerned. We went via Bloemfontein and through the hot Karoo. The meals were mass produced, I think in polythene tubs and then there was the black bin liner that was passed around and we had to throw what was left in there, and I can remember the chips were half cold and fairly oily, but sufficient to cope with, and of course we had all been given stuff by our families; we were all munching biltong and the odd chocolate. It wasn't that bad. When we stopped at the stations we weren't allowed to buy cool drinks, but by the last day of out trip there was invariable somebody selling canned coke, and we were buying them through the window in any case. The NCOs were turning a blind eye to that. They had realised that there weren't going to be too many serious problems on the way.

OUDTSHOORN

I remember arriving in Oudtshoorn in the middle of the night. Having been warned about a `roof-ride' we were expecting something like that but our first introduction to Oudtshoorn was that this was strictly *verboten!* We found out afterwards that our drivers knew that they could get into severe trouble if there was any damage done to the `precious human cargo' in the

back. It wasn't cold. It was January, but you'd been sleeping under a blanket. It was a cool Karoo night, and most of us were standing there in our T-shirts, shivering and feeling quite cold. We had coffee when we arrived, but it wasn't hot coffee. It was typical army - it had been standing for at least half an hour while waiting for the people to arrive. We formed up outside the Quartermasters on a big concrete slab at about 2 or 3 in the morning. I can remember being marched off to our lines, and being assigned to beds that just had the normal piss-poor mattress on. There was no bedding. We were told that we could grab about three quarters of an hour's sleep. We were woken up when it was just getting light, and we were marched off to breakfast and so on.

I remember going through this sausage machine of about three days. It was explained to us fairly well; some of us would be off to the medics, some of us would be off to the quartermasters. Some of us would be off to do these tests, and these tests, and those tests. There were three days that were just a blur in oblivion. We were told that we would get access to telephones, but not yet, and there was to be no noseying around anywhere until you got permission, and it was for our own good, and to talk about our bearings. They were very apprehensive times. I remember guys bailing out. I have clear memories of a guy with an M.A. - this distance from the quartermasters store to the lines was probably 350 m, and at 10 o'clock in the morning walking up to the quartermasters stores after you had been there from 5 collecting kit, with a *trommel* that had stuff just jammed into it, and stuff on your head and stuff on your back, and stuff on top of your *trommel* and you battled to juggle it all. This guy was quite a round portly chap, and he just baled over in the morning with heat-stroke. It was tremendously hot, and that was the last we saw of him. I remember having to carry his kit in, and half an hour later we were asked to hand in his kit, and we never saw him again. He was sent off.

The chap that I had been worried about in the train carriage; Andrew, was still with us, still in the same platoon at that stage. We were divided up into phantom platoons, knowing that everything would be reshuffled. I know that most of us didn't stay together. We were purposefully split up. We were apprehensive about this as well, because at least these were known individuals that you could deal with. Most people were in the same boat and you quickly ended up finding at least one soul mate - I remember ending up with another Afrikaans guy from Natal. We had that in common. I could speak Afrikaans, and he was from Natal.

This guy, Andrew, when we got to the medics, I remember him being taken off, and while we were having all our injections and tests and everything, he was suddenly called out of the line. I found out afterwards that he was borderline anorexic, and he was being RTU'd. (not G5'd??) No more national service for him, he was going home. I was conscious of the fact that he had "failed" but that he was lucky to have failed. That was the feeling that I had at the time. I think he went in wanting a way out. Chatting to him before he left, he was very relieved. He didn't even spent the rest of that night with us. He just came and collected his kit and then went off to sick bay, because they felt he was a risk of sorts, and he said that they had told him that he would be going home the next day, and that he shouldn't worry and that he must not do anything silly. I remember wishing him luck and just saying;

`Don't worry about it. We can't all cope with it, and I'm very grateful for you that you're going, and I wish I could be in your shoes.' I can remember saying that to him, just wanting him to feel better. He was a buddy of mine. Not a particularly close buddy, but I knew him well enough to be concerned about him.

I can remember these long lines, waiting to be weighed, standing in queues comparing test strips after you had urinated on them; `How's mine different from yours?' `Did they say whether your feet were fine?' Just simple inane little things like that. It was just nervous chattering amongst ourselves.

[We didn't have corporals jumping on us and screaming at us at all!] We were being treated firmly, and we were told that we would be treated firmly. `We were at Infantry School. It was an honour and a privilege to be there, and that we must view it as that, and if we had a problem, we must voice it. We should not go and do anything stupid. We would be treated with strict discipline, but not unnecessarily harshly, unless we brought it upon ourselves.

I remember my brother telling me about going off to Kimberley and having to eat out of a *vark-pan,* and of having to wash a *vark-pan* in cold water. In my whole army career I never ate out of a *vark-pan*. The first time that I saw a *vark-pan* was in my second year when I went to Ladysmith to do JLs selections. Before then I didn't really know what they looked like. There wasn't a *vark-pan* to be seen at Infantry School. Except in the Detention Barracks; they had them there. I remember seeing them there in my second year, when I was a Platoon Commander. We didn't queue up to have our food dished up to us; we were marched in silence into a dining hall; there were about ten or twelve seated at each table. You stood behind your chair until everybody was in. You would stand while they said grace. Then the NCO on duty would say; `sit'. After that you could chat and talk. Later on in training, if they felt that we had been disobedient, or that we hadn't trained well enough, then we had to eat in silence. The later on in the year you got, the more you rebelled against that. Generally you had to keep a control on the volume. Three companies ate in one dining room. Bravo Company, which was the teachers company - although it wasn't exclusively teachers - was the largest. At the height of our strength we were eight or nine platoons of forty men per platoon. We shared with Charlie Company and Delta Company; they were three or four platoons each.

National Servicemen cooks used to put the food on the tables a large silver food server was put down at the head of the table, and then the two troops at the end of each table used to serve up, and they had to serve up fairly and pass it down the line. We had jugs of juice and milk and whatever on the table, knives and forks and plates. You never washed a plate. You had to stack them neatly at the end; whoever served had to do it at the end. Certainly, during the initial stages when you started getting fit and hungry, there was always lots of food; lots of bread. It was advantageous to be dishing up, not to short change your buddies, but to make sure that you scored by having to dish up. Towards the end of it all, nobody wanted to dish up. There was a slight vying to try and shuffle out of it. In general, I know that at some of the SAI camps eating times could be unpleasant, or could be made unpleasant.

That was just the one dining hall. We had `Alpha', Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Foxtrot Company were all January Intakes. Echo, Golf and Hotel were the

July Intakes. Generally Hotel Company was an initial intake, and then it shrunk down and they eventually became absorbed into Echo and Gold companies. Generally we were much more than ordinary platoon strength, and more than the normal company strength. I was initially moved into Foxtrot Company, which was a sports company. When they reshuffled things they moved all the sportsmen together and they went off to Foxtrot Company, and we were changed over to Bravo Company. That happened within a week or two.

The whole catering line was excellent. We were given three meals a day. Sundays were slightly different. Once the proper routine had started, you got up. There was always coffee or milo. Normally there were rusks. It was very seldom that they slipped up and didn't have rusks for us, early in the morning. Generally whoever was on duty in the platoon that day would go down and collect the coffee and rusks and drop it off in the ironing area, which was next to the ablutions section. You would get up, and in your underpants rush through; get yourself a cup of coffee and dive back into bed. It was brought in at six. You had to be out of bed by 7.30 on a Sunday. You could have a bit of a lie-in. It was quite civilised from that point of view. That was unless you were out in the field training, which was a totally different situation. This happened from pretty early on. All you had to do was to go to your church parade in time to go to church, and then come back. Sunday lunches were always excellent. We always looked forward to Sunday lunches. It was normally a roast of sorts, and there would be a pudding. This also happened during basics. The food was always excellent when you were in the base. When you were out in the field training, then sometimes you got cold food, and that was a different scenario. Sundays were always looked forward to. We never ever got messed around on a Sunday that I can recall. It was always a time to ourselves. There were times when we had to prepare, but it was never under enforced preparation. A lot of the guys washed kit on the Sundays. I know that when I was at Ladysmith I ended up working on a Sunday which is something that I had never had to do at Infantry School. During conventional phase, things were slightly different. We viewed that as being slightly different, and we understood that.

We didn't get jumped on much during the first few days. We got the *bos-bussies* later on.

During those first few weeks of being processed, we were kept on edge knowing that the gear would change at any time. You were always apprehensive about it. Looking back on it now, it was actually a very easy time. We were treated very humanely. There was a sword of Damocles hanging over your head.

Basic Training

When basic training started, we weren't always that well informed about times of passes etc., although I thing that we were far better informed than anyone else in the normal infantry battalions at the various SAI camps. We knew what period of training was coming up. We were told what it would involve; we were told how long it would be, we were told what evaluation was concerned, and everything. By Saturday morning at the very latest you knew what the programme for the following week was going to be. You

weren't in the dark as far as that was concerned. Towards the end of a phase you were always briefed as to what the next phase would entail. If not formally by the platoon commander, then certainly informally by the NCOs. I was very lucky; we had two very good NCOs. A chap by the name of Craig Daniels and Chris Groenewald. Craig Daniels was an English-speaking NCO from the reef - Joburg somewhere. He was a very young guy. Chris Groenewald was from the Cape. He was Afrikaans speaking and his nickname was `Groenies'. Craig Daniels was just `Daniels'. Groenies was a very nice guy. He had actually done two years of his teaching diploma, and then he had bombed out. He made it understood; `Co-operate with me and don't rock the boat, and then I won't rock your boat.' It didn't take him long to instil that in us, and it didn't take us long to realise that potentially we were on to an easy wicket. `Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours!' Not to the point of being obsequious or anything like that, but we had a very good relationship with him. Our platoon commander was a short little guy. They used to call him; `Mannetjies'. All the other platoon commanders referred to him as `mannetjies'. He had a couple of nicknames though. We used to call him the `*akadis'* (lizard) as well, because he had lizard like eyes. He was a short little guy, and very paraat. Initially we thought that he was very *paraat*; he was always immaculately turned out. Chris Groenewald and Daniels quite happily spoke English to us; he didn't often speak English to us. He battled with English. He was a teacher like us, but from the Cape, and he was a year ahead of us. I was very fortunate in that I was very soon recognised - I guess you could say that I became his `platoon pet', but I never got flak from the other guys in the platoon with me about that, like you would get for `teachers pet'. I kept my nose clean, I worked hard for the tests, I worked bloody hard for the inspections. I didn't want to get into trouble, and that was the way that you kept your nose clean. My inspections were always highly rated. It worked to my benefit later on. He took me of as a kind of `platoon orderly'. I effectively became platoon orderly for that whole year. When we went to the border, during training for example, we had to rotate roles, so he had to take on another platoon orderly for certain training sessions, but when we came to deploy, I was platoon orderly. It was a comfortable billet in some cases, but in other cases, when the other guys were sleeping, I had to be preparing their maps for the next day. Certainly I was looked after from that point of view. I appreciated that. A lot of guys; there was a third of the platoon that didn't like him at all. A third liked him a lot, and a third were indifferent. I was one of those that liked him, but I was very fortunate in the relationship that I had with him. We had `pinks' which had to be filled in, which were really the assessment forms of our progress; your fitness tests and all your other tests went on there, and I always filled those in for him. I learned that you don't volunteer. He made us write something out, and he said that we had to be careful and that it had to be neat because it was going somewhere; it was the first letter to our parents, or something like that. I can't remember what it was. Then he said; `Who are these three people?' and he read out three names. He had been looking for the three neatest handwritings. Then, when we came forward, he said; `Okay, you go and sit down' to a chap that was pretty slovenly looking, a guy that never got it right as far as gaining some form of military bearing - what the military were looking for. He took the two of us

aside, and I became the main orderly and the other guy became the sidekick, but he eventually dropped out of the course, and that was it. He obviously selected us on the basis of; `I'm looking for someone who can assist me from an administrative point of view in running the platoon, but had to be presentable, so when I send him down to the company HQ, I'm not going to be seen to be in a bad light because I've got a *troep* that looks untidy.' I didn't feel that I was being used at all because it was to my benefit. There were times where, if he knew that I had been working late the night before, finishing off the pinks, and if my inspection wasn't quite what it should have been the next morning - I always made sure that it was better than 80% of the rest of the guys - I followed that rule of saying; `Don't be in the top ten, but be near the top. Keep your nose clean.' He would sometimes say; `Its not up to your standard,' but that's all that he would say, and I knew that he was taking into consideration that the pervious night I had been doing work for him. I employed exactly the same system the year that I was platoon commander; everybody did it. It was the way to survive. It certainly made your life a damn sight easier. You would have survived if you had had to do it yourself, but you would have got far less sleep. Instead of being in the lines until twelve o'clock at night, he and I (in our respective years) would have been in the lines until ten o'clock at night. That makes a difference if you have to be up at five the next morning. He was hard on the guys that gave him up-hill. That was the general impression of Infantry School; when you bucked the system, they would nail you. If you gave them reason to, but if you didn't buck the system, then it wasn't a problem. Just keep your nose clean and go with the flow. That was the Infantry School philosophy for me. I think a lot of guys at the *SAI plaases* got messed around unnecessarily; the typical *rond-vok* for the sake of *rond-vok*. We didn't often get *rond-vokked*. We had a lot of `Hurry up and wait', but not being messed around unnecessarily.

By the way, lots of the guys were going off to go and write supps. Etc. to finish off things during the first few months. That was very cushy for them, because they would be away for three of four days, and had a pass long before the rest of us had it. I remember, surprisingly enough, one guy going away on pass to go and play in the South African *Yukskei* championships. I think he had been there for about ten days at the time. I think they had just had time to give him a decent uniform, and he went off for ten days to go and play on the *yukskei* championship. While he was away he phoned one of his buddies who was in the platoon with us, who told him that we were battling to polish floors, and he came back with a polisher from his mother. It was brilliant! We were the first platoon to have a polisher, and we were allowed to. We got it earlier than we were allowed to, but we hid it in a cupboard and it wasn't a problem at all. We were always envious of the guys who could go off and write their supps.

The way it was explained to us is that generally; `You ouks are bright. You've all got degrees and diplomas. The first three months were very much what the normal rifleman would get at a SAI camp; the weapons training and so on. We did basics, and then we went into a platoon weapons phase. Those took us through the first five months. Those were the most physical times. I can remember being dead-tired. Whenever you sat down for a lecture, you battled to keep awake. We used to get up at 4 in the morning, and drill for an

hour and a half before breakfast. After that there would be lectures or practical demonstrations to attend, or practical sessions with the firearms; the LMGs and everything. It was explained to us clearly that we had to know how to use every single weapon that a platoon could use, because you might have a troop who would be utilising one, so we did every single weapon; down to stripping it down to its smallest part. We were supposed to be able to do that in our sleep. I sat and thought about it the other day; if you gave me an R4 now I would be able to dismantle it. We were down to dismantling it and putting it back together again in less than 30 seconds. I could probably do it now, (11 years later) and put it together again in a minute and a half. With a little practise I would get back down to about thirty seconds in about four or five times. That was drilled into us. The physical side of it; we double timed everywhere. We did a lot or marching, we did a lot of running, we did a lot of PT. The worst part of an average day for me was PT. I was very apprehensive that a PT session could go into an *op-vok* session. Invariably we realised that it came down from higher than the platoon commanders. It wasn't often that a platoon commander decided that his platoon would stay on and do extra PT. It would come down from higher than them that `discipline was up to maggots'; nail these guys during PT.' We were never nailed to the point of blood and guts anywhere, but drill them hard physically. I didn't enjoy marble PT. Everyone of us had a marble - concrete block - I can't remember the weight it. Don't forget that a number of our infantry officers and NCOs went on and did the parabat course. Marble PT, pole PT, we had light PT or rifle PT. Rifle PT wasn't a problem. Marble PT was the pits. I remember sweating particularly with that. I've never been a particularly physical person, and I just didn't like PT. The only thing I liked about PT was that generally it was the last thing formally to do that day, although often we had lectures in the evenings. At least those weren't formal training stuff. I can remember, certainly for the first four or five months, being very apprehensive every time we went out into the filed and to the range; concerned about when they were going to give us a *bos-bus*. In retrospect, I see that this was totally unnecessarily; I should have clicked to that very soon. Infantry School was more about producing Infantry Officers and Infantry NCOs than messing people around unnecessarily. Generally the cream of the crop was kept behind to run the scene. You didn't get the cocky little NCO with a chip on his shoulder wanting to show these guys who were going to become platoon commanders that he would tell and officer-to-be how to behave. In some of the companies where they had NCOs straight out of school that was the case, but our guys weren't that. Our corporal Daniels was straight out of school but he was very mature for his age, and he knew how to read these guys. He was also under Chris Groenewald's wing, and Chris would sometimes say; `Listen; watch it sometimes. These ouks are brainier than you, and you can't get through their skulls by being physical with them.'

PT I didn't enjoy, but on the whole it was fine. There were long sweaty runs. There would be times when we would be chased around the tree; *`Sien jy daardie boom?'* Particularly in the first two or three months there were some occasions where they pushed us. Once was the Company Sergeant-Major told the NCOs - he couldn't directly tell the platoon commander what to do. Because he was PF he told the NCOs what they should do, and then he

suggested to the platoon commanders that they go along to keep an eye on their troops. He was telling them via the back door; `Listen. I'm PF. You're going to do this.' We didn't have a particularly unfair company sergeant-major, but particularly with the Permanent Force NCOs , there was a problem with dealing with the national servicemen looties; particularly the ones who had two pips and had a degree or something like that, who wasn't going to take nonsense from a Permanent Force NCO, whereas the average one pip platoon commander was a young whipper-snapper and who was scared of him because he was a more mature man. For a lot of us, a staff-sergeant could be two or three years older than us, and you weren't going to take nonsense from him, particularly if you had rank. I can remember one day running through the veld and having to leopard crawl, and then on your knees, and then rifle above your head, and running around this tree and then around that tree, and then leopard crawl here, and thinking that there were ant-bear holes there and it would be lovely to dive into one of those and wait for the whole platoon to come past again and fall into formation again, but I was too scared to be caught out at that, and suffer the consequences, so you just kept going.

We had a guy, Andrew Meintjies, in our platoon. He was a huge ouk. He lost about 40% of his body mass in about three weeks. I can remember him sweating great dollops; litres of sweat. But by the end of it all he was a very fit, lean-looking guy; we used to joke with him and call him a `lean mean fighting machine'. He was our `lean mean fighting machine'. The other thing that was impressed upon us was security. We had to keep the various parts of our rifle separate. The rifle went into your clothing cupboard, and the working parts and the magazine went into your *trommel*. The way they drilled it into us was that if they caught us with either one of the two open, they just took the number of your rifle down, or of your breech (*sluit-stuk*); if you knew that it was your number, then you owned up, and after PT you would have `gang PT' with the marble, and that was generally carried on for another three quarters of an hour. Passage PT; that was within the bungalow the corporal (called the platoon sergeant) - in the normal conventional situation they would have sergeant ranks - you would have two or three guys carrying on with it. I did gang-PT once, I think, and after that I learned that you locked everything away. We had one guy, Godfrey Sibede - he got the nickname *`sluit-stuk'* Sibede, because five or six or seven times he left his *trommel* open, and the platoon sergeant would come out and say; `Mmmm. What have I got? Number (so-and-so)" and of course the first three times he didn't know what his rifle number was, and that was a big sin as well. That was even worse than leaving the parts lying around, so he got messed up. I remember once we had a particularly hard PT session - we had to do an obstacle course. Some of the guys had written a test and done badly; I'd done all right I had to do the obstacle course twice. There were probably ten of us out of the forty that only had to do it twice, and had to do it in a certain time and we would be fine. The rest of the guys had to do it another two times because they hadn't done well in their test, and then of course there was another whole lot of guys who hadn't locked stuff away or whose inspections had been bad, and they had to do it another two times. For me, two times was bad enough because it was a mean obstacle course. At the end Sibede came out of it, and I thought that he was going to drop down out of exhaustion. We were always well taken care

of. If we were out on a day like that, there was always an ambulance around. There was an ambulance on call within three minutes of where you were, often within sight of us there was a medic sitting in an ambulance. Not that you could walk up to him, but he was there for heat stress and heat exhaustion. I can remember that we actually carried Sibede back; he was shivering and we asked to take him to the ambulance. `No!' I can remember opening up a big `bar-one' (Mars bar) when we got back and giving him that, and going to supper. One of the guys stayed behind, and afterwards we came back to see that his sugar levels had come back up. That was the bonding that was there. We looked after ourselves. He was just a bit of a *`vaak seun'* (Dozey Boy) he was a very nice guy, and he made a very good platoon commander after that, but he certainly learned the hard way to start with. There were others guys like that. We were a mixed platoon of English and Afrikaans guys; there was some animosity between what we would call the `Tame Dutchmen' and the `Dutchmen'. A `Tame Dutchman' was generally an Afrikaans guy from Natal or the Cape. There were one or two `Tame Dutchmen' from the Transvaal or the Orange Free State, but generally they were the `Dutchmen', and there was almost an Afrikaans `Mafia' in our platoon. I got on very well with him because I can speak Afrikaans, but there were one or two of the English guys who he was a bit obnoxious towards, but generally you just avoided him and carried on with your own life.

We were all graduates or diplomats. Without exception, to be in Bravo Company, you had to be one of those. The Company symbol was an R4 with an owl perched on it, with a graduate cap on it. That was our symbol. Some of them had a Dip. Ac. or something like that. I would say that 75% of us were teachers. Alpha Company was an officer company, Bravo was an Officer Company, Charlie was an NCO company, Delta, in my first year was an officer company, and I went into Delta Company as a platoon commander; depending on the army's requirement for NCOs; in my second year I was a platoon commander in an NCO company. Echo Company was a July Intake NCO company, Foxtrot was a sports company - Officers. Gold was a July Intake officer company, Hotel was a July Intake company that split up - some of the guys went into Officers Companies and some of the guys went into NCO companies. They were the ones who fizzled out. I was in Platoon Seven of Bravo Company; at one stage we were nine or ten platoons, and with the attrition that went on, they split platoon ten up into the others, and the platoon nine, and then platoon eight.

Apart from the differences between an officer and an NCO company; the reason that we were put together was that we would form the bulk of the people who would become involved in the cadet corps in schools. We were given extra in the Comops line in order to be good cadet teachers. We were given extra in the line of urban counter insurgency because we were likely to encounter problems in an urban environment. I remember we spent a whole week's course on being a cadet officer at a school; one day of that was *`skool beveiliging'*, how to safeguard a school. We went into the Oudtshoorn area and went and saw how the various school cadet corps operated, and actually used those schools as dummies; how would we protect this if there was civil disobedience? You had to say how you would deploy your cadet corps to do that. And how would you protect it from a terrorist attack, and bomb drills at

schools and that sort of stuff. The only time that I ever got involved afterwards when I was teaching for two years was to stand around and watch the cadet corps. NCOs drilling the guys around.

A week at infantry school - we had sport parade on a Thursday (elsewhere it was on a Wednesday), and then at some stage it changed over and then it changed back again. Obviously someone high us decided that we were bucking the system. On the day that we had sports parade, we generally had a relatively easy day, but this was not always the case. There was a Chaplains period and a Comops period; that was the day that you went to the Quartermasters and changed your laundry around - got new sheets and so on. We never had to wash your own sheets; you took your bundle of sheets under your arm, and marched down to the QM and handed stuff in. Those were the days on which, if you had a shirt that was the wrong size, you could go and change it. Extra kit issues were done on those days. If you were given a study period it would be on those mornings. Generally there was an early lunch on those days, and then you went off and did sports parade. Those were the days that we looked forward to for two reasons; they were easy days; you had one more tough day and then you had a weekend which, depending on what phase of training you were in, meant at least Sunday to look forward to, if not Saturday afternoon to look forward to as well. If there was any base maintenance to be done, it was done on those days, or on Saturday mornings. This didn't involve mowing the lawns - there were people who did that - it was generally trimming the edges and weeding. I remember spending some Saturday ,mornings, and even some Saturday afternoons, which really pee'd us off, sitting on the rugby filed digging up clover. On my last trip to the Cape I showed Vivien the dams stuff because we found it all over the place. I remember sitting there with my *pikstal* having to dig this stuff up. That was the kind of stuff that it involved, or doing chicken parade. There were one or two times when it involved packing rocks to stabilise an embankment on the base perimeter. Generally they weren't bad times; it was an easy time. Evenings were often used for lectures. We wrote tests every second or third week; some of them were Comops tests. I can remember having to write out `Die Stem' for fourteen marks. You didn't have a choice of which language to write it in; you had to write it in Afrikaans. I remember being pee'd off about that. Just the first verse. There was a time when we ended up having to write it in English, and the English guys won all the way. You knew it in English, but you had to know it in Afrikaans as well. The Afrikaans guys squealed about that. The tests were generally done on Thursday mornings as well. Everyone traipsed into the dining room and sat there and wrote tests. Not necessarily all the companies, but, so that they could spread you out, a company at a time. At the end of every phase we wrote a big exam, which all the companies wrote at once; they synchronised the training from that point of view. Our training differed from the *SAI-plaases* in that point of view. Generally we were always told; `You guys are above the rest by virtue of the fact that you behave like that. See it as a privilege to be seen like that, and toe the line.' I remember doing inter-company competitions. They said to us; `These young guys should theoretically be able to drill better than you, but you can do better.' And then we did. Bravo Company had the band. We had the Infantry School band, which, traditionally was vested with us. Under exceptional circumstances they

might take a trumpeter from Charlie Company and put him into the band. 80% of the band was Bravo Company.

If I can remember the main warfare type phases correctly; we went through basics, then platoon weapons, then we went through a conventional warfare phase (which was the trench warfare phase) then we went through to a rural counter insurgency phase before we went up to the border, then we went up to the border, and then we came back and did an urban counter insurgency phase, and then we did *`vormingsopleiding'* - we spent a lot of time doing etiquette; we did a wine tasting course then. It was a two-hour lecture. We weren't allowed to taste wines, but we were told - we had the formal dinners then, so that the first time we got to a formal dinner as an officer we knew how to behave. Towards the end of that year we became COs. You started getting the pay of a CO while you were on the border. We only got the *`kak-papier'* when we got back - the white CO band. (Either it was `What is that bog-roll on your shoulder?' or you were a `shit-house officer'.) The NCOs got one line just before they went up to the border; they went to the border at the same time as us, or while they were up there. Their pay kicked in at the same time. I remember them wanting to try and enforce on us that we should *`strek'* them, and us telling them to fuck off! Because next year; `You're going to be polishing my boots if I feel like it' sort of things. It was their attempt to try and pip us to the post, but it was the closest that they ever came to it. I remember coming back from the border and we were allowed to put our white CO bands on. The NCOs always carried their stripe, and that was the big advantage for them. They probably had that for about two months while we didn't have anything but the little CO band, and the only time that we were allowed to put on our rank was after the passing out parade, except the people who marched in the passing out parade as company commanders and platoon commanders in the parade, and I was chosen as a company commander for that, so I got to wear my pips before the general actually said; `Well done, Officers and NCOs, you've got your rank.' That was a matter of hours before the time.

They said to us; `You are not doing basics. It's a combination of basics and platoon weapons. There was so much extra in basics - the lead to the whole Comops that the ordinary *SAI-plaas* riflemen didn't get that they called our first six months `JL's. During that time of JLs, towards the end of JLs we had a week of Comops; we had had the Comops period every week, and every company had a Comops officer along with the admin. officer, the platoon commanders - they were all NCOs. There was also another general dogs-body type officer - Ops. Officer. The general Company structure was the Company Commander who was a Major or a PF Captain who was about to become a Major, a PF Captain or a PF Lieutenant two-pipper who was about to become a Captain, a company sergeant-major who was an AO1 or an AO2, or very seldom a staff-sergeant who was about to go up one rank. The second in charge of the company NCOs would also be a PF sergeant or a staff sergeant, depending on what the rank above him was. Then the rest of the structures were all NCOs. There was generally a clerk who started off being a one-liner and by the end of the year would be a two-liner. Bravo Company had two clerks because of our size. Every company had the various platoon

commanders, and the Ops. Officer, a Comops officer, and an admin. officer. They were all national servicemen looties.

During the Comops period you either had one of the PF guys from the Comops wing or your Comops officer come in and spend time with you, and this was about the psychological aspects of warfare - the propaganda and that sort of stuff. `are you guys all happy? Have any of you got social problems?' Those were the guys who gave us our addresses and told us what we could write home about and that sort of stuff. That was in the beginning.

We were given extra input into the psychological aspects of warfare. We spent about a week doing Comops. Only Bravo and Foxtrot companies went and did this Comops course. I found out later that the guys who led the course were guys who worked in civvies for one of the quasi military things - I think that there were one or two companies set up by the government or by the SADF - who knows? - to infiltrate the civilian population and disseminate information that would lead to the general well-being of a nation under siege. Psychological warfare. During that week we went off into the training area - to a very pretty kloof. When we arrived there we were split up into tents which weren't with our normal platoons, so you mixed with other guys. each tent would get a name, and because of the preponderance of Afrikaans guys, we were Tent General de Wet. There was a Tent Louis Botha. General Jan Smuts didn't make the grade! We were in civvies for this time; slops and T-shirts and shorts. Our firearms were back in base. The only time that we saw our company commanders and company NCOs was when they came for PT, and that wasn't even every day. On some days we were just told to go for a run ourselves. Then they started what we called the *`kop-smokkeling'*. It really was a piss poor attempt at brainwashing, to put it crudely. They went through the 'total onslaught'. We had had lectures on revolutionary warfare and counter-revolutionary warfare, but more the - this is how its done. This is the recipe. This was more; `This is the recipe. Did you know that your sister could be a victim of the recipe?' Those are the impressions that I had at the time, and the memory that I came away with. We had a *snoepwinke*l there, one of those refrigerated trucks that you could go and buy cokes and so on from. It was a cushy time. Obviously they wanted to make it as comfortable for us within the army situation, so that we were malleable and ductile. Most of the Afrikaans guys loved it. A lot of the guys who had been on *veld-skool* in the Transvaal, a system that I didn't know, saw it as an extension of *veld-skool*. Not that all *veld-skools* were like that, I found out afterwards. We had lectures. I remember one guy bible bashing, and using the bible to justify why we were fighting the onslaught, and I remember thinking to myself; `You are talking utter crap.' It was the classical case of quoting totally out of context, whether you are quoting from the bible, or a politicians speech, or a piece of legislation, but the classical case of quoting totally out of context. We were also told that it was a time for us to question, a time for us to explore, to reason. Very cynical. I can remember standing up at one stage; `Has this struck anybody that we are fighting this conflict, that we're calling a noble war, and the guy at the receiving end of our lead believes as much in his cause as we believe in ours?' This was during an open discussion when we were meant to be discussing it openly amongst ourselves. The instructor types were just standing around. I realised afterwards that they all had short haircuts; not

quite military haircuts, but they definitely had a cushy job. They were coining it there with a covert operation. It was not an offensive covert operation, but an insidious covert operation. I can remember saying this, and I can remember these Dutchmen - some of the more ardent fanatical type Dutchmen jumping up in arms, and the facilitator saying; `Wait. We must consider this point.' Then the guys would stand up and try and rationalize this whole lot away. They said to me; `Why are you on this course?' I said; `I'm merely proposing a point of view. Let's discuss it.' They were totally oblivious to that, and I was shot down. This was on a day when our Officers and NCOs arrived and told us to go for a run up the hill and come back again. That was the PT. They were obviously having a *naafi* time, back in base. I remember running up with my best man, the two of us sitting behind a bush. He was from Grahamstown; he had been to Rhodes University. He said to me; `I thought you were going to get crucified in that discussion.' I said; `Ja. I think I'm just going to lie low and let this roll off, like water off a duck's back.' That's effectively what we did for the rest of the time. We would just sit there, and quietly think that to ourselves; `It's an easy time. Let's use it to our best advantage, and don't mess with it.' That was a very real part of our training. We had a whole week dedicated just to that, with follow-up from our own Comops officer.

The Comops officers were always considered to be lucky. It was a good billet to become a Comops officer. It was a cushy thing to be. It certainly was nothing that I ever had designs upon.

Why did people drop out? Certainly in the beginning guys dropped out for physical reasons. Guys that were G3K3 were RTU'd, and Andrew was a case in point. G2K2s were fine. If, during the course you progressed sufficiently to become a G3K3, they could utilise you as a Comops officer, or they would send you off to a different corps. If you were officer material and you had sufficient background they would send you off to a different corps, and send you off to the admin. corps or the Technical Services Corps. Personnel Services Corps was a corps that such guys often went into. Towards the end it became that.

Conventional Warfare Phase

Conventional phase at Oudtshoorn was in the middle of Winter. A Cape Winter is cold and wet. We packed our bags on a Sunday evening to leave at four o'clock on the Monday morning, to be marched out in the dark. It only got light much later in the day. We were marched out into the field somewhere, and ate breakfast in the dark. We had a lecture as soon as it was light, to be told what the philosophy of conventional warfare was all about. For `Conventional warfare' read `First World War trench warfare', with modern armour thrown in and the role of Pantser, the role of air support, and the role of whatever. They told us that they had to teach us this to prepare us in case the revolutionary warfare developed into conventional warfare, and revert back to revolutionary warfare, as the support for revolutionaries changed and as they mobilised differently. We had to be able to go between those two. The course was probably about seven weeks long, of which the first two weeks were in base preparing lecture-wise, and the last week was back in base writing the exams. The middle four weeks were out in the bush, in the cold and the wet. We had our rucksacks on our backs, which contained

our spare pair of boots, and you had a bivvy and a ground sheet. Generally we slept in trenches. Quite often we started digging at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and in the morning you would be able to stand upright in it, like a foxhole. It was horrendous. It was wet and it was cold. I remember in the nights of the first four days sleeping in two different trenches that I had at least partly dug myself. It rained the whole time. I would sleep under just a space blanked with my army kit on. I didn't bother changing because it was just pointless. I would keep my kit as dry as possible, including my sleeping bag. Other guys dug trenches, put a ground-sheet at the bottom and a bivvy over the top, and half way through the night you would hear the water rushing, and the *`Ag! Vok!'* as the buckets of water got dumped on him in his sleeping bag. (This was from the bivvy collapsing, not maliciousness from your NCOs?) I decided that the way to do it was to wait until the sun rose, and then you would sleep dry after that. I think I had three or four nights of just sleeping under a space blanket. I got very little sleep, shivering in the freezing cold; trying to keep my bum dry, trying to keep my kit dry, trying to keep my rifle dry so that it didn't rust. You would go out on the Monday afternoon and you would come back on the Saturday afternoon, for the only shower that you would have all week, to clean your kit and to go to church parade the next day, to pack the Sunday night to be ready to go out the next day.

I remember thinking that I'd been to varsity, and all the stress of writing exams. I was a teacher and that was what I was going to be after two years of army. I didn't really need this in my life. To go through all of this just to get officer pips at the end of it wasn't my idea of fun. `Thank you very much; I'll bale out of this.' The first thing that you do is to tell the NCO, who says; `No, man! It's not as bad as that! Come on.' It was an early phase where he couldn't be too friendly. We are now talking about half way through the year, about July. We started conventional warfare probably in the last week in June. The second time you go to the platoon sergeant he says; `Okay,' he'll go to the platoon commander. A day later you ask the platoon sergeant; `Has he spoken to the platoon commander?' I didn't want to rock the system; I just wanted to make it known that I was wanting to bale out. He said that he had discussed it with the Lieutenant. Then you ask for an interview with the Lieutenant, and he says; `What's wrong.' You tell him; you go through the same story. He says; `Okay, I'll speak to the company commander.' A day or two later I asked him whether he had spoken to the company commander. No, he hadn't spoken to the company commander. He had to speak to the 2IC first, then he came back and says that the 2IC has said that I could make an appointment with the company commander. Three days later, if you're lucky, you get a reply saying; `When there's orders next week you can go to your company commander.' Things were dragging along. In the mean time I had started smoking. I just needed something. It was a misguided attempt to keep myself - under the circumstances - sane. In retrospect it wasn't as bad. I started smoking Gauloise plain. After three days my throat was so stuffed that I threw the cigarettes away. That was the end of that.

Eventually I got an interview with the company commander who said he would consider my request. Next thing, during training, I was called in to go and see the Dominee. The Dominee says; `What's wrong? Are you all right?' I said; `I'm fine. Thank you very much.' I explained the scenario to him. `I

just don't see that this is my aim in life. Its not worth it me going through all this just to get two pips.' Then, two days later they called for sick reports, and the sick reports would travel into base, have a shower, and get taken to sickbay, and then by mid-morning or by lunch time they would be back in the field again, depending on what their problem was. Some guys did it just to go in and have a shower. I frowned upon that. I was out there with the rest of the guys. You didn't bullshit your way through a thing like that.

They said; `Any sick reports?' Two guys put up their hands. *`Wat is verkeerd met jou?' `Nee, my enkel is seer. My kop is seer, my keel is seer.'* They would say; `Have you been to the medic? `Yes I've been to the medic.' `Right, you can sick report.' Then they said; *`Mansfield, waar's jy?'* I said; *`Korporaal?'* He said; *`Jy siekrapoorteer vandag.'* I said `Huh?' He said; *`Jy gaan basis toe.'* I went back, had a shower, and then a psychologist wanted to see me. The psychologist was an English-speaking guy. I said to him; `There's nothing wrong with me. Don't worry. I'm not going to commit suicide. All I want is to bale out of this thing. I'm not happy doing this. I'm not a happy camper.' Off I go again. I get back and the Dominee says; `How did it go?' I said; `Dominee, I'm still feeling the same. I'm wasting my time here.' `No! You're not wasting your time here. We're concerned about you.' A day later you get told that you have to go in to base again, and you go and see the social worker, and the social worker says; `Is everything all right at home. Can I phone your parents to check up for you?' I said; `No. When I last spoke to my girl friend we were still going out and I had no suspicions that there is any problem.' I was just trying to say that I just wanted to bale out. I wasn't going to do anything stupid. I will continue to play with my live ammunition, thank you. It was the one thing I can have fun doing.

Another week went by and the company commander called me in again. He says; `Are you all right?' `Ja, I'm fine thank you very much.' `Your case had been reviewed. Don't do anything silly. Your case is being reviewed.' `Okay, fine.' We were now starting to head to the end of the conventional phase. We now had about five days left of this *kak* and then we were going to go into the evaluation phase of it. After that there would be two or three weeks there preparing for border phase, and then we were going to go to the border. I started to think; `Hang on. It's almost going to be worth my while to stick this out, with these ouks taking so long. The kind of thing that happened on conventional phase. There was a Captain Barrie. I didn't like him. He was an arsehole as far as I was concerned. He was very arrogant. He had been in the infantry specialist wing or something like that; anti-tank warfare or something like that. He had been to France and he gave this marvellous lecture on APSFD, armour piercing fin stabilised discarding sabbart warheads that were fancy things; a hard chunk of steel was fired out and the casing and was fin-stabilised and threw bits off and hit the tank, and he could tell us marvellous stories about what it does to a tank. He was God's gift to the infantry because he had been on this course to France. It was very under-cover. We weren't supposed to know about it. He was probably four years older than us, but not older enough for us to have any respect for him. `In civvy life, what would you be, you wanker?' That was the kind of attitude we had. I remember him taking us through the conventional warfare phase; `I

know how to do this. You must listen to me. I'm your father. I'm going to tell you how to do it.' Most of us were feeling; `Aw, please! Spare us this!'

We went through the drill in daylight of taking the high ground, to be dug in be the next morning, to be ready to repel the onslaught, so that the next night we could be ready to take the next high ground, and all the hoo-hah that happened with conventional warfare. We did the drill during the day, and he wasn't happy about it, so we did the drill again. He was telling us that it wasn't good enough, and if we didn't do it properly by that night, then we would go through to the next day and to the next day. So we went and took up our positions that night, and he showed us where the trenches should be. The soil there was sandy with succulents and thorns and stuff. It was sandy enough that if you dug a hole you could lie down on your back, you would be invisible. Below that you started to get a layer of *kalk-steen*, that has those white rocks in it; not a quartz, but a calcium carbonate deposit that hardened into a semi-concrete state. Guys were breaking picks and spades trying to break through this stuff. Someone else had had to do the same thing there, a few paces away from where he told you to dig your trench, and he had marked it with sticks. Three paces back was another trench that was half dug. You knew that someone had sweated. All you had to do was to clear the much out of it, and it would make a passable trench. So what happened that night was that everybody moved three paces back, moved their little sticks back that marked the arcs of fire and everything, and we baled into those. And of course the next morning he threw a *vrot thrombie*; `That bush was five paces away. I measured it before you guys even came here. You sneaky little bastards! You thought you'd get one past me?' During the day he made us fill those trenches in, and that night take up positions marked as he had originally specified. What he didn't realise, of course, was that, instead of digging the trenches in the new places, it was far easier for us to throw loose stones over the holes that we had just dug, and move the bushes that he used as marks, which is exactly what we did. The next morning; `Not quite good enough, but I'll let you have it.' If he'd gone back a day or two later he would have seen some very wilting looking bushes, because it was the easiest thing to do. Pick up the thorn bushes and move them back. Our platoon sergeants were very much in the know because they had probably used the same trick the year before. They were probably grudgingly admiring us for seeing the light. That was how you coped as a national serviceman in the army; therefore we were brothers, and therefore we won't squeal on you. That was it. This was the sort of thing that you had to put up with.

So then we got back, and we wrote this exam, and of course, keeping my nose clean, I do well in the exam. Next minute the company commander calls me in; `have you decided what you want to do?' I said to him; `I had decided what I wanted to do. I'm close to border phase now which I believe isn't as bad as this, and I've kind of reached a stage where I think that I'd rather see it through now, thank you very much!'

All he said to me was; I thought you'd see it that way.' I said to him; `Do you mean …' and he said; `What I mean is that I knew what you were going through, and I decided that you had the guts to see it through without causing any nonsense.' He didn't say; `I strung you along,' but effectively he was

saying `I kept you believing that you would succeed in your application, knowing that you would come through it and that you would see it this way.'

My initial reaction was of being totally pee'd off, but then thinking about it; you don't rock the boat. I decided to stick with it. I actually liked the guy. He was very nice. I remember earlier on in that year, probably during the build up to conventional warfare, that I got a message to go and see the company commander. He was standing there between the lines. I was thinking; `What the hell have I done now?' I rushed over there and went and saluted and everything. He said to me; `I've got bad news for you.' He told me that my uncle had died. He had just got the message, and I must go and phone my mother now. He said it was `Someone Thomas.' My initial reaction was `Commandant Thomas?' who was my grandfather, and he said; `Ja, I think so.' And I said; `Or *Majoor* Thomas' (Roy - you letting him know of all your PF connections - J) who was my uncle. He said; `I'm sorry. I'm not really sure. I know it was a "Thomas" who had some rank in the army. It was a message that I got. Please go and phone your mother, and come back to me.' I went and phoned my mother and she told me that my uncle had been killed in a car crash. She asked me to phone back later when she would know what the funeral arrangements were going to be. I went along to him and he said to me; `Who was it?' I told him it was my uncle. He said that he was sorry to hear of what had happened, and I explained to him what had happened. He said; `Do you know when the funeral arrangements are?' I said; `No, I've got to phone my mother later.' He said; `I will tell the officer on duty that you are to be allowed to use the phone later tonight. If you want a pass to attend the funeral, then via your platoon commander route your request to me.'

When I phoned my mom that night we decided that it probably wasn't worth the schlep of me organising a pass just to fly to Pretoria to attend a funeral. It was up to me. The uncle lived in Pretoria. We didn't see him that often. I was very fond of him. He was my mom's younger brother. My mom said to me; `I will understand if you can't make it, but if you can make it; that would be nice,' At the end of the day, I decided that I wouldn't go. My platoon commander came to me that night and asked; `Do you know what the situation is. Are you fine?' It was on the Wednesday and there was a big test coming up. At that stage I wasn't contemplating getting off the course. I thought it would be to my disadvantage not to be around. The company commander explained it to me in this way as well. He was very nice. He said: `I'm not going to stop you going, but you must realise that its an important time. I said `Okay. Fine.' I spoke to my mom about it and it was fine. He made a point of asking for me afterwards, and saying; `Are you happy with your decision. Don't feel that I'm putting pressure on you.' I felt that I was being treated very fairly. Humanely. I had respect for him. I thought about it afterwards, grudgingly, he was a good judge of character. Had I been given the opportunity, I would have baled out. Possibly I would not have regretted it, but possibly I would have. In retrospect, looking back on it now, it wasn't as bad as I thought. Hats off to him. I never considered suicide or running away or anything stupid like that. I was under stress and tension then, but it wasn't particularly nasty. I was a coping with it. He was reading the situation exactly that way. He strung me out.

The instructors were sat upon to ensure that their style of presentation had to be right. That was part of our last phase as well; instruction methods. Before we went and fetched out troops we had to show our new company commander all the little cardboard strips that we stuck on the blackboard that highlighted the main points of the lecture. It was very much `training' rather than `education'. They made sure that it was good quality. My impression is that at other places in the SADF at that time there was piss-poor training on the go. The quality of our training was good. No expense was spared. All of us tried all of the weapons. The 40 mm grenade launcher, the `*snotneus*', I alone shot off a hundred rounds through that during my military service. Some guys shot one round off in an infantry platoon elsewhere. I knew what the effect was of shooting it high in a tree, low in a tree, or dropping a ground shot. When it came to throwing grenades, you threw five grenades from a concrete structure to protect you before you went into the training of how to do trench clearing operations, during which we used live grenades as well. I think I fired 3 RPG 7s while I was my first year of national service. They made sure that we knew the applications and limitations of those weapons.

The author with his R.4, during Platoon Weapons phase training.

I know that the *skietbaltjies* that people walked around with. I know for a fact that some of these were farcical. If you wanted to cheat, you could cheat. On my first attempt, I got the bronze *skietbaltjie*. I can't remember what score you had to shoot to earn it. That was a genuine. There were other guys who got silver *skietbaltjies* when I knew that my target shooting was better than theirs. They had a buddy in the pit with a bic pen; you would call it `a bic pen *skietbaltjie*'. In my second attempt, right at the end of my second year, I got the opportunity to shoot again, and I got the points for a silver *skietbaltjie*, but I was never awarded it. If I was particular about my uniform I would have made a hue-and-cry about it at the time. I remember being quite miffed about it at the time, thinking; `What's the point of walking around with a bronze

one, when about 40% of the buys with the sliver ones have `bic pen *skietbaltjies*'?'

LMG training, Platoon Weapons phase.

I remember that we had what was called a *VTB kamer; `Vrye tyd's bestuur'* (leisure time utilisation room). Our rooms in Oudtshoorn, at full capacity slept five during our first year. One of those rooms was designated as the *VTB kamer*; we could paint one wall in and design that we wanted to. It had to be passed by the Comops officer to made sure that it didn't have any lurid details or anything subversive in it. Some guys were into painting, and we had wonderful lunar landscapes and desert landscapes, and setting sun in the Savannah landscapes. It was frowned upon if you didn't change that wall during the course of the year. There were fairly comfortable cheap cinema type seats in that room, so that three quarters of the platoon could fit in there quite comfortably, with the rest of us on the floor, and there was a TV there. Every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday night there was a video on, passed by the Dominee, of course. One night I remember we were watching a movie with some woman dancing around nearly naked, and we may have had a flash of nipple at that stage - this was on the old South Africa, and the next minute it went blank. We found out later that the Dominee had walked in to the room where this was being played from, and he had decided that this was subversive. During basics the films were there, but we never got time to watch them. If you were lucky you got to watch ten minutes of it. While you were polishing the floor of the *VTB kamer* you go to watch some. I was quite surprised at that. Of course we had R5 deducted off our pay each month to pay for the video hire. At the end of the year we realised that the guys were coining it into the regimental fund.

I was surprised, of the guys who were married, and whose wives moved down to Oudtshoorn to be with them, how soon they got sleep out passes. They had to be there for all the training and everything, but they got sleep out

passes after three months. Certainly they had to be there for the first six weeks, and then after that they would get passes to go home to their wives over the weekends, if there wasn't training over the weekend. Eventually they got sleep out passes. They had to have a bed in the dorm that they stood inspection with, but essentially they went home, which was a great benefit to them. That relieved them of a lot of the stress.

Considering what I had expected when I went in, and what I had heard from Richard and other people about how it had been for them in the SAI camps, the Infantry School really impressed me. They made a point of saying; `You are in a privileged situation as national servicemen. Enjoy it.'

There were aspects of the training that I knew was downright propaganda. I remember being totally pee'd off with the Dominee. Particularly during my second year it was an eye-opener to see him swearing and seeing him telling the filthiest jokes and getting as pissed as anyone else in the bar. I remember thinking; `This is a Dominee?' Having said that, he was an Afrikaans Dominee. The conventional church probably didn't want him, but they would tolerate him as a chaplain in the army. I had quite a lot of respect for our Methodist Chaplain, who was just the local guy from town. He wore army uniform. Towards the end of the year he explained to us that it was expected of him to wear army uniform. He did pitch in civvies once in a while. It was clear to us that he wasn't there doing that duty because he felt comfortable from a military point of view. He was doing it because he felt he was attending to the needs of his flock in that establishment, whereas the Dominee was *`Vir Volk en Vaderland'*. That was quite clear to me. I had the distinct impression that there was a large `us and them' wherever you were in the army. Us and them; NCOs and officers, us and them; *Rowwe* and *oumanne*; us and them, PF and national servicemen, us and them, English and Afrikaans, or English and Tame Dutchmen versus Dutchmen. What we used to refer to as `tame Dutchmen' still used to refer to them as Dutchmen. It was that clear. Us and Them; the graduates vs. the non-graduates. Almost everywhere you went there was some form of division that was imposed in some way. Military sociologists, if there ever is such a beast, would love it; making studies of these various things, how your surroundings imposes roles upon you.

Most of the psychologists that I came across in my first year, or in my second year as an officer, were English speaking. Thinking about it afterwards, I don't know how many Afrikaans speaking people go into psychology, and I think that the Afrikaans doctors got far more comfortable billets. They ended up being posted where they wanted to be posted because they were Afrikaans.

Vasbyt

In the earlier parts of our training, one of the lecture rooms that we used fairly informally. On the walls were pictures of guys who had done their *vasbyt* during the 70's. I remember them carrying *trommels* filled with concrete blocks and poles and everything. When we got to our *vasbyt*, we had to carry first line ammunition, I can't remember how many rounds it was, but it was heavy. We had to carry our extra pair of books and that sort of stuff. We never had any of those extra nasties with us. We certainly had the new

style packs rather than the old style webbing. I remember thinking; `Are we getting a bit softer here now?' Then I remember being told somewhere that the point about being rugged and super-fit was less important; you want people who can fight, not people who can run and fight. You want people who can survive a fight physically and mentally rather than just physically. That sort of stuff was thrown at us.

We certainly had the MPI (Military Psychological Institute) guys early on in my first year, and we had a visit from them later on, and then towards the end of the year we had a visit from them again. I don't remember being tested at all those stages, but certainly at the first two visits there was some form of testing done. My impression was that they were there to be used. They were *`kop-tiffies'* but they certainly had some value. They weren't disregarded. There was; *`Daai kop-tiffies gaan met julle vandag gesels.' (`Hier kom die manne met die dik brille en die wit jasse.'*) there was some sort of grudging acknowledgment that they had a role to play, without too much bickering about it.

Potential officers didn't have a tougher time than ordinary troepies?: The average *bok kop* at a *SAI plaas* would have a short sharp blow of intense physical training in basics. After that, depending on where they ended up, be it in an infantry camp or on the border or wherever, they could expect to get messed around to varying degrees. Then it depended on the guys' behaviour as well. It was enlightening for me to arrive at Ladysmith and to see some of the sorts of people that we saw. My impression of my training was that it was intense continuous hard rigorous but not irrational training. It was consistent rather than erratic. We had one or two lapses into irrational behaviour from one or two of the PF types, like from Captain Barrie and the company sergeant major. My impression of my national service was of relief that it was over, relief that I had come away unscathed from something that could have been potentially damaging; whether it was in stepping on a land mine or being separated from my family totally for two years, or coming back `*bossies*' or whatever. It went well. There was great camaraderie, particularly in my second year. I made some really excellent friends. Some of the bad parts were bad, but looking back on them now, never that bad that I couldn't cope with them. In general it was a character building if not totally worthwhile experience. There are some things that happen to you that you think; `Gees! I really didn't need that.' It prepared me for anything that hit the fan afterwards. There was some sense of that bout it. Invariably when I look back, it's more the positive things that come to mind rather than the big negatives. Generally I am an optimistic person; optimistic to realistic. If I had had a more pessimistic view of life, I might look back and think; `I'm flawed. I'm emotionally scarred.' Generally I feel that it wasn't a bad experience. If they said to me; `Would you do it again?' I'd say; `Thanks, but no thanks!' If they said; `There's some things that you're going to have to go back and do. If circumstances forced us to be called back now for another year's military service of some sort, I would feel that my previous military service had prepared me reasonably to very well for that. I suppose I feel quite positive about what I experienced, but I recognise that there were negatives, and that other people had very negative experiences of military service. I don't deny that one little bit.

Endurance route march during 'Vasbyt'.

Border Phase

Then we went off to the border. The border was great fun. I really enjoyed it. I went to the border each year, both at the same time of the year so it is rather difficult to separate the first year's trip from the second year. I remember in the first year flying from Oudtshoorn in a Transall - the four engined one (*sic*). There was the book `Shane' lying under the seat that the previous guy had left there. I remember picking that up and reading that all the way through to Grootfontein. I had done `Shane' as a school book in Standard Six or Seven, so it brought back memories. I remembered it having dragged at school, but in the aircraft it was over in no time. I was bored and the engines were just drumming away. It was not a pleasant aircraft to fly in. We had the webbing seats, which arch your back, and you can't get comfortable, and you can't just get up and go and have a leak or anything like that. The engines just moan and groan away. You can't see out, so the only way that you know whether you are ascending or descending is by the tone of the engines. Our platoon was part of the advance guard for our company. We were whisked through to Oshivello in Buffels, and I can remember feeling quite sea-sick in those; at the speeds they were doing they did a slow rocking, like a ship of the desert, almost like how I imagine a camel would be. We ended up acting as perimeter security for all the other flights which didn't land at Grootfontein, but landed right at the gate to Oshivello. 61 Mech was slightly further up, about 13 ks. Oshivello Gate was right on the border of the Etosha Game reserve. We weren't actually in Oshivello base; they set up a temporary base for the time that we were there. Oshivello base itself was a standing base; there was a security fence. There were PF families; wives, kids and schools. 61 Mech also had permanent structures like concrete buildings, brick and mortar stuff, and proper fences. We were deployed in the perimeter around this lot; the whole of Infantry School, and everything that we had was temporary. The tents. We had to dig our own latrines, and trenches for stand to, every evening when the guys had to go out at dusk, and guard the

perimeter at a likely time of attack. Our platoon had to go and secure the airfield at Oshivello when everybody else flew in.

Our training there was hard but very pleasant. By then we were very fit. The discipline side of things was certainly lightened up. We still had to stand inspection, but it was mainly just to make sure that things appeared to be neat. There wasn't detailed inspection, but our weaponry was still checked with a fine-tooth comb. We went through many cases of 5.56 rounds, shooting them. We all managed to get an empty case. We slept in tents but on a ground sheet on the ground. We had no mattress or anything like that, because we had extra kit, everyone very soon buried one or two of those ammo cases beneath the bed, with a plank over it. Everyone did that as a place to keep your *kos-pakkies* from home, and extra stuff that you didn't need to carry with you every day. It was all the normal infantry training; foot patrols, vehicle movement, ambushes. We had lectures sitting out in the field. We had done some preparatory work down at Oudtshoorn in lecture format, but that was more to get us ready to go up there; what it was like up there, what we would have to expect. Who was SWAPO? Who were we fighting. The role of Koevoet and the SWAPOLTIN, and the South West African Territorial Forces, and all those sorts of things, their ranks that were bars rather than the `V', a bit about the Owambo culture because we were going to Owamboland. Most of the stuff was done out in the bush there. Because we were doing officer training, we did a few days of the basic stuff that the troops would have to know; the different patrol formations and so on. There was a lot of emphasis placed on us giving orders as though we were taking an infantry platoon out. We all had to draw up the orders as if we were platoon commanders taking an infantry platoon out on a vehicle movement or a foot patrol, or whatever the case may be. We had to build sand models and everything, and then they would say; `Mansfield. You do the warning order.' Half way through my warning order, they would swap to anther guy's warning order, and although my times might be different, it was looking at the principles. `You've forgotten to give the warning order to your company quartermaster that you needed this item.' That was the sort of detail that was drilled into us, which was quite tedious. You would do all that and then the platoon commander would give his orders, which would ostensibly be the correct one, and we would have to make corrections to our own, and then we would go out and do the movement. That was when I was the platoon orderly for most of the movement. He rotated me out which I quite enjoyed because it gave me a change of scene. It just so happened that I enjoyed that map work. I can remember walking in patrol, and 1600 paces with a pack on my back, we worked out was one kilometre. So as the platoon orderly, I would have to walk with one other guy that the Lootie would nominate, to walk and count, and at any stage he would say to me, `How far are you?' and I would have to convert in my mind the number of paces to the number of meters I had walked on that particular bearing. I did so much of it that I became so good at it that I could almost do it in my sleep. I would find myself rhythmically counting from one to a hundred, not necessarily knowing where I was in that sequence, but being able to convert it and say `856 pace, therefore 5??metres.' It was that kind of walking. I really enjoyed it.

You got back in the evening and there was PT. There was a *`groot wit pad'* (great white road) that used to run down from the base that used to go down from 61 Mech, and we used to run on that for PT and there was a fine white dust, and you would come back to have a shower and so on. We used to shower in those shower trucks; we would line up, and they would let in as many that would fit, and then they would turn on the water for a minute, and you would get wet and soap yourself down, and then they would turn the water on for another minute, and then you were out. That was quite fun, but it took a little getting used to; showering that quickly.

After that we did evaluation and we had officers and NCOs from various bases in the vicinity come in and evaluate us. Your platoon was drawn out of the hat to do whatever that particular evaluation was for. I can remember guys still being thrown off course at that stage. That was right towards the end. About five or six guys were thrown off when they were already receiving Candidate Officers' pay. When you got off a Buffel you had the drill of clearing your rifle and making sure it was safe, and they would fire a shot off, safely. If the guy was borderline, that was sufficient grounds to get him RTUd. We had had quite a few nights of being out and on long patrol; after hours patrols and so on. We were in a training area and we were told that the possibility of us bumping into terrs was remote, it was less likely than thirty or forty kilometres further north. We had to be careful. We working above the red line, and we were getting danger pay. When we slept at night we sometimes went to our temporary company base.

We did the training in two phases; an initial intense phase right at 61 Mech, and then the company went out and deployed in the training area, and there only two platoons slept in the base at any one time. Everyone else was out. At that stage I think that Bravo Company was down to six platoons. There were four platoons sleeping out every night. Platoons were still heading towards being forty people. A normal infantry platoon is 33. What we used to do was that the extra guys used to act the roles of support guys; trackers and mortars, intelligence and so on. When you did the movements, those guys were in the right places. I remember doing a lot of intensive fire and movement. We used ammo like you couldn't believe. That was where I fired most of the RPG 7s and 40 mil rifle grenades and so on. We weren't supposed to call a 40 mil grenade a *`snotneus'*. If you called it a *`snotneus'* down at Oudtshoorn, it was grounds for a little bit of extra PT. When you got to the border, everyone called it a *`snotneus'*. No problem at all. Even the platoon commander who had been trying to enforce that discipline down in Oudtshoorn. It was little things like that that made you very much aware that you were going into a real situation now. Discipline had been brought up to a point where they could let it slide, and it would be comfortable for everyone all the way around.

On the night which was to be the last time our platoon had the opportunity to do a night ambush as an exercise. The next time that we could do it was if our platoon's name was pulled out of a hat to go and do it for evaluation purposes, so they were being very strict. We had the company sergeant major as the PF guy who was evaluating us. I was acting platoon commander that night, with the real platoon commander shadowing me. What invariably happened during evaluation phase was that the staff members from

outside gave some leeway to allow you to choose certain things from an evaluation point of view, but he would drop you in the dwang by saying; `That person must be LMG number 3.' It was for this reason that we all had to know all these roles. They were schooling me for that particular thing. If they were given any leeway, and asked; `Is there anyone you want as platoon commander?' they would say; `This is the man.' Because I had been the orderly, I knew a lot of the roles. It wasn't a difficult task. The main thing was co-ordinating and knowing who was to do what when, throughout all of these.

In an ambush, you get a killing group that lines up under cover of darkness. You have had reconnaissance earlier during the day, of just the platoon commander and the orderly, and the three section leaders. They withdraw and everyone else is preparing, and then after dark you move in to the killing ground and you set up your killing group. You have an early warning group and a stopper group. The drill is that you go in; everyone walking in single file, and you backtrack and make a loop over your own tracks so that if anyone is following your tracks for some reason, they end up directly behind you. If you're in the killing group, you can just swivel round. It's very involved. Lines go out. Everyone is connected by ropes. There's a sort of code, one tug means this, two tugs means that. Orders were given in this way. We were using claymore mines; all those had to be set up, *pooitjievakkels*, with all the trip wires that were involved and so on. A *pooitjievakkel* is a ground-based flare, a trip-flare. You normally lay an ambush like this based on intelligence, and there would be an expected direction, and the drill was that the stopper grounp and the early warning group could swap roles as was required. Because of that the sergeant major kept it until the last minute before announcing; `that was where the evaluation was going to come from. In an ambush you collapse your sections into the killing group, and you send the section 2IC and two riflemen out into the stopper groups, and the rest of the platoon constitutes the killing group. They have between them just R4s, but they've got rifle grenades with them. Everything else is concentrated on your killing ground; your mortar and your 3 LMGs; you set up arcs of fire, and you do all that under cover of darkness. It's a case of the platoon commander going and standing over every man and taps him on the shoulder. He is lying on his belly. He hands him two sticks. The platoon commander puts the two sticks into the ground to indicate the arc of fire. There's a test to check that all the communications are working. You don't use radios with the stopper groups; you just click the handle. Two in quick succession, pause, two in quick succession, pause, two in quick succession means that one of the groups has picked up enemy. You listen, and he clicks once as they come through so that if ten were coming through, you would wait until all ten were in the killing ground. As the platoon commander you are lying directly in line behind the LMG, and you kick him and he initiates the ambush at the same time as the guy with the mortar does it. What happens is that as the firing goes up; the first round out of the mortar is an illumination round, and then subsequently you've got the live rounds. The stopper group and the cut off group, at that point they fire off their rifle grenades to the left and the right of the killing ground, and the mortar gives you covering fire behind the killing ground. All the other fire is deployed into the killing ground, along with the claymores and everything. You lie there for

four or five hours, just waiting and there's nothing, and then all hell breaks loose for five to ten minutes! The theory is that you do that, and at a certain stage you give the signal, and then you do fire and movement through the killing ground, and you've got to go through all the drills after that of casevac and all that stuff, casualty reports etc.

I remember one guy in my platoon who had always been very safe and sound. This guy was lying on his stomach with his R4 and he fell asleep. At that stage everyone's rifle is on rapid fire as well; except the guys with the rifle grenades. You actually put a strip of plaster over the selector lever so that it doesn't make a click at night. It's the platoon commander's job to go and click every rifle on to `fire' so that he knows that everyone's rifle is on fire. In the early warning group and the stopper group, its the NCOs's job to do that before he goes and lies down. This was all done, and this guy fell asleep, and as his head nodded forward, he pulled his trigger, and of course the rifle grenade went off. The training is that if that happens, you fire in any case. Essentially you have been compromised, and you then have to fight your way out of it, and hope that you get whoever is out there. When this happened they had told us that we would be waiting there for a long time, to test this sort of thing. The company sergeant major is standing behind you, and if he hears any noise, then it's big points off your evaluation. He is within metres of the group. Of course this happened after about two hours. It upset the whole exercise. We were meant to be lying in wait for at least four hours. The next day this guy got a sandbag. It was a Saturday night, and the next day was a Sunday. I can still remember; we were in a temporary base, in foxholes and I was called by the platoon commander. I went across to him, and he said; `Fetch Dippenaar and tell him to bring a *sand-sak*.' The guy's name was `Dippies' from `Dippenaar' and he was taken apart with a whistle. I still remember lying there in a grove of mopanis under the hot sun. Those little black flies were bothering us, and this guy was given *sandsak* PT for about two hours. By the time he was finished he was close to dehydration. We were very short of water at that stage. I think we got about seven litres of water a day for bathing, for cooking, for everything. We generally didn't bath. Most of us donated at least a litre of our own water for him to drink. I also dug a hole for him and put a ground sheet in it, and I think we got about 4 l of water together so that he could bath in that. You know if you see a horse that's been running, and you see that white foam, but you also see the streaks of sweat that had dried into white salt. He was covered in that. His lips were thick and swollen. That was a relatively serious offence, more serious than getting off a Buffel and doing a drill designed to avoid the accidental pulling off of a shot. He wasn't thrown off, though. We knew what a guy pulled off a shot like that, the thing that went through the back of you mind was; `Is he likely to be RTUd? Yes or no?' It was based on the guy's character as you had known him through the course. Dippenaar stayed on, and he got his pips and so on.

Another change from Oudtshoorn was that we were down to two meals a day. We would have coffee when we woke up, and then at about 10 we would start heading back towards the temporary base for breakfast, unless you were really far out and living on rat packs. A about twelve we used to send two guys back to camp to go and get a can of juice. It was quite unusual because you would get leechy juice and marula juice and mango juice that you didn't

get in Oudtshoorn. The food was excellent. We had field kitchens. A lot of the food was fried because I think that was easiest for the cooks to do. We didn't get very much fresh fruit, but they made an effort to get as much as possible.

We had demonstrations from the Air Force coming in, and demonstrations with the Olifant tanks that they had at 61 Mech. I was most impressed with those things. They also brought in a couple of Mirages in and a couple of Impalas in from Ondangwa. They were impressive, but disappointing to an extent. The Mirages came in with rockets of sorts, and the area that they hit, they just destroyed. They were off target; they were meant to be hitting the shell of an old combi. I think their fire was called in from about two ks away, and they were slightly off. The combi still stood there after you had thought that it was going to be taken apart. Obviously, because we couldn't get close to it, we couldn't see the shrapnel that was in it. Then they brought the Impalas in and they just used their cannon. There again it was from quite far out, and then as a follow up they brought in one of those Alouette gunships with a 12,5 mm single barrel cannon mounted across the back so that it was pointing out of the side door. There was just the flight sergeant who was lying behind this thing. This chopper seemed to be spinning around on its own access; I remember seeing while he was firing that the chopper was being swung out at the back like this. He had to fire a short burst and let the chopper come back in again, and he was the most effective at taking that combi apart. We thought; `Yeah! We'll take the Alouette any time!' We weren't likely to get taken out if we called it out, and we could see the results of this. That was a demo that was laid on for us.

When we were up there we also had a visit from the *`Dankie Tannies'* and their *`Dankie Tannie sakkies'*. They used to come up from Grootfontein for the day or something like that. I remember getting all the stuff that goes with it; bic razors and pens and everything. I think that training was about six weeks in total.

Then we deployed for about four weeks. Our deployment was to the area of that little town called Onesi, and the intelligence suggested that it was supposed to be Sam Njoma's grandmother's village, and that she was still living there. Effectively our task was just to go and be a presence there, and to try and pick up whatever we could. Our platoon was chuffed to hear that we were going to be doing vehicle movements rather than foot patrols. We would be moving around with vehicles. We thought that this would be quite cushy, but we reckoned without the person who was actually in charge of that part of the company, and that was the infamous Captain Barrie. We eventually worked out that, although we were assigned Buffels for vehicle movement, ended up walking more than any of the platoons that was supposed to be doing foot patrols. His idea, which I don't know if it was right or not, was to drive to a point, find a secure place like a rise or something like that, leave the vehicles there, camouflage them and everything, and then just send endless foot patrols out from that point. I can remember on one night we were tasked to set out - two sections and our platoon commandeer because he kept one section back to safeguard the vehicles. We were tasked to move 5 kilometres away, and then come back, so we moved away with only our battle jackets and 4 litres of water, and part of a rat pack for food and that sort of stuff. It was supposed to be just a quick recce to see that the village that was supposed

to be there was there, and to see what was going on there, and then to come back. When we got there, at about 3 in the afternoon, he sent us on for another four kilometres to another place, and then, just when we were thinking that we would have to start marching back about 10 ks right at the end of the day, along with all the security that you go through. You don't move fast under those circumstances. He said that we should spend the night there. I remember our Lootie trying to get a radio message through to him that we were totally unprepared. He just wouldn't listen to that. I can remember spending that night in the freezing cold. This was in September; we had extremely hot dry days but at night the temperatures plummeted and we had nothing to sleep under; no bivvy, no ground-sheet or anything like that. I remember at about 10 o'clock that night my Lieutenant telling me to go and get everybody's battle jackets, and he and the corporal lay in the middle like spoons and I had to pile the battlejackets over them to keep them so that they could keep warm. A single battle jacket didn't mean much to you in any case. Some of the guys had packed *bos-baaitjies* with them, but I certainly hadn't. We thought that we were going out in the stinking heat and that we would then come back again. A battle jacket was a webbing type arrangement a bit like a waist coat; it wasn't a back-pack.. It was your gear of choice if you went in to a combat situation. You could carry a lot with it. the other option was the chest webbing, where all your magazines went into, and the big pack. Under those circumstances, the first drill was to drop the pack, and then go through and fight, whereas with a *gevegs-baaitjie* you were far more manoeuvrable, and yet you could carry grenades and smoke grenades and all the bits and pieces with it very easily. It was comfortable, but it was totally inadequate if you wanted it to keep you warm. You went through about 4 litres of water a day there, just for drinking. By that night we were running short of water and we were told not to use any of the local wells or anything like that.

The rest of the guys lay around the perimeter. I was within the perimeter, close to the `HQ'. Myself and the guy who was carrying the mortar pipe lay close to each other like spoons. It's the closest I've ever slept to another man. You really snuggled up to his back, or you had him snuggling up to your back. When you were lying with your chest up against him, and when your back was getting freezing, then you would flip over so that the other side of you could get warm. We were so pleased to see the sun the next morning; it was fantastic. We didn't really get any sleep; we just dosed. You couldn't really sleep during the day, even when you were generally stationary during the heat of the day because the flies were all over the place. - We used to put dried cow-dung In the little tins from the rat-packs and light that so that you had a little bit of smoke, and that used to keep the flies at bay. The problem with them was that if you crushed one, then a million others would arrive because of the pheromone that was given off by that one.

Captain Barrie was very *paraat*. The other platoons ended up using wells for water whenever they needed it. They were dining on fresh meat every second or third day because they were buying goats off the locals and slaughtering the goats. They were going into the *cuca* shops and buying beers and so on. They were all national servicemen, whether they were the officer or the NCO in charge, and they were just doing things their way, whereas because we had this PF handing around, we had no choice but to do it his

way. We had one brief time of freedom when he was sent back to base; two Buffels went through and one section for protection, and we were sent out to the far reaches, and of course we went and bought a goat. We took the grids off the Buffels and used those to braai the goat meat on. When he got back he found that the grate of one Buffel had been used, and the driver got hell, but he didn't squeal because he was part of the gang. That was the only bit of relief that we had. I was amazed at the logistical support that we had at that time. We were about 60 ks into the sticks. There were roads. There were F2 50's driving around like crazy, but there were also wrecks of F2 50's where they had hit mines. We were not allowed to use the roads for walking or for anything. If you crossed a road you crossed it at 90^{o} and there was a whole drill to cross the road with the vehicles going across. Kwevoels came in, ambulances came in. We had post and *kos-pakkies*. My mom used to buy standard corrugated cardboard boxes with food in them, and Vivien used to buy them to send to me. I got two of those in one delivery. There was biltong in it, there were all sorts of bits and pieces in it. I remember thinking; `What am I going to do with all of this?' because the only place because the only place you had to store things, because you were moving so much, was in your pack. So, with about four of my mates, we ate as much as we could in one sitting. I remember that in those packs, both my mom and Vivi had sent about ten rolls of Super-Cs. (To this day I have never eaten another Super-C.)

From a logistical point of view, whenever the canteen truck arrived, that brought your rat packs, but you got ice-cold cokes. There was a scurry the previous day to deliver the order by radio so that if you wanted six cokes and twenty Bar-Ones, you could get them. At the same time you were paid your danger pay in cash, so that you could pay for all your stuff. They would bring your letters and you could send off letters at that stage as well. I thought this was marvellous. Resupply was every three of four days. The medical backup was great as well.

We never saw any action, not once. We had Owambo *tolke*, interpreters. We didn't have any intelligence guys with us, or anything like that. These two Owambo guys with us used to make fires at night. We had been told not to make fires or to show any light at night. We used to use the fuel tablet; dig a whole and put your *emma* on top of that to heat anything. These guys just used to make a fire. This drove our lootie mad because he was trying to maintain discipline, or at least a show of it, and these guys were making fires to cook their rice and soup on. Twice they got into trouble for going off to the *cuca* shop and coming back pissed and compromising our security. We were following the drills; not 100%, but at least we were trying. Whenever we came across people away from the villages; the odd male walking along by himself we would stop him and ask for his pass book, or ID document of sorts. One day we came across, separate from each other, two guys that didn't have ID documents on them. They made the one guy take his shirt off and they found that he had chafe scars. What generally happened, if a guy like that had scars from carrying something then he's either a terr whose carried a pack or he's been used by terrs to carry a pack. If he's a terr you're going to arrest him as a terr, if he's not a terr then you want the intelligence that comes from that. We nailed these two guys, and I remember that the *tolke* did a bit of their own interrogation while we were waiting. We had radioed ahead to HQ to

find out what the next drill was. Was a chopper going to come and fetch them? Were we going to do it by vehicle? and so on. The *tolke* took these two guys and made them assume the press-up position, and putting down a cup of water in front of each of them, and dribbling a little bit of water in the sand, and sitting there with a little switch - a little stick, telling the guys to stay in the press-up position; not to do press-ups, but just to stay in that position. Whenever they moved their arms or wanted to relax or something like that, they used to smack them on the back of their hands with a switch. `No, no! You mustn't move now.' Of course there's this cup of water in front of them. About three hours these guys just had dollops of sweat pouring off them. Our platoon commander had been quite happy to tie these guys up and wait for somebody to come and take them away, and then they weren't his problem anymore. Captain Barrie heard about this and he gave our platoon commander instructions to use these two Owambos to try and extract information. `Nothing physical,' he said. `They'll know what to do. Let them at these guys.' Eventually one of the local headmen because involved, and he identified the one guy who didn't have the chafe marks as a cattle thief who had been in the village prison, which was essentially a corrugated iron long-drop type thing, sitting out in the baking sun, and he had escaped. He was a cattle thief, and the headman was quite happy to take him, thank you very much. We weren't going to be handing the guy over to him, under any circumstances, but the deal was that we would hand him over to the South West African Police, which was 15 kilometre away, and they could sort it out. The guys with the scars was taken off at the same time. He maintained that he had worked in a mine in Angola, and they were able to verify that fact. That was the closest we came to any form of excitement. In some ways I suppose it was a bit disappointing.

I remember being quite relaxed about three or four days after we deployed. You certainly felt that you were - not invincible, but confident that we would be able to put up a pretty good fight against anything that was thrown against us.

We were there at the wrong time of the year for action really. We were there during the dry season. Most of the SWAPO and PLAN incursions were during the wet season, and also when I was up there in 1986, the conflict was being fought in Angola. It wasn't filtering down. The wet season hadn't started. That was why we were there really; just to maintain the presence. I think that the most likely thing would have been to have compromised a guy who was lurking with the local community from a previous incursion. He might have started shooting if he felt that he had been compromised; I don't know. We certainly weren't expecting large forces; we were expecting two or three people at once, which was why when these two people popped up, fairly close to each other but independently of each other in suspicious circumstances with no ID, and no weapons with them or anything, one started to say; `Hang on! It aroused our suspicions.' But that was it.

The deployment was four or five weeks, following six weeks of training, and the evaluation. I can remember that I `bathed' once during that time. We had about four days of coolish, overcast weather where we hadn't moved around much, and we had managed to stockpile some water, and a resupply came through, and after dark we scraped a hole in the ground, a ground-sheet

placed over it, lie in it and wash yourself in three or four litres of water. This was just myself, but a couple of other guys did the same. We knew that we would be moving off shortly after that. We had been wearing the same clothing and the same underpants; you just didn't bother changing. I used to wash my hands and my face at night; I used to save just enough water for that. I used to feel so much better for having been able to do that. We were so caked with dirt that I remember being able to write grid references and short messages on the outside thigh of your browns. Particularly where your hands rested, and the sweat stuck there. It was the ideal place to write something with a little stick, particularly if there was a little breeze blowing, and a notebook's page would flap around. You could write down a grid reference of a mills bearing there. On a normal compass you've got 360°; the accuracy there is not quite good enough for military precision, but 360° was converted into 2400 mils, or something like that. There were about 8 mills to 1 degree. Your compass was then graduated in mills. Instead of 270(½) degrees, you could split that half down to .2 (.5?) of a degree.

The external examiners were from all over Sector 10, and also from other companies within Infantry School. That would also count as an external evaluation. I would say that it was probably 50% of the external evaluators were from within Infantry School and the other 50% were from Sector 10. I think that we even had one or two Sector 20 guys there that were brought in for that purpose. Generally the ranks were staff sergeant and higher; I don't think we had any PF sergeants doing the evaluation.

(After deployment) We were then loaded on to the *Wit Olifante* and driven down to Grootfontein. We had to go through the ritual of being inspected for contraband, AK47s and everything. I can remember coming through apprehensively, but with a 300m flare, which I fired off at a New Year's celebration about three years after my military service, along with one or two others that I had been able to get during my second year at Infantry School, along with some smoke grenades. That was effectively what I brought through, and some Angolan money which I've still got stick in a cupboard somewhere. I was hoping to get hold of an AK47 round for my brother because he collected bullets, but I didn't manage to get anything like that. They ran a bit short of time with our guys coming through.

We were taken to Grootfontein Airport and we got on to a SAFAIR 737 and I can remember that the air hostesses were the first non-black women that we saw in that time. They were in their SAFAIR uniforms and we sat there and thought that we were going to get meals, but all we got was a sort of lucky-packet that had a packet of crisps and some peanuts and some sort of fruit juice in it. There were all these guys sat on the plane and the air hostesses just disappeared from sight; they were up front with the Captain or whatever.

We landed in George and were then transported by vehicle back to Oudtshoorn, and very shortly after that we came back on pass with Candidate Officer tabs, and with step-outs for the first time. It was quite a momentous occasion.

Expectations of PLAN: There was a distinction between people who were conscripted in to SWAPO-PLAN, who would often be carrying food down, and so on, and the equivalent of our Recce types. Those Recce types were well equipped, and were psychologically strong, etc. They weren't to be

taken lightly. Certainly I was aware that when it came to the Angolan forces, as opposed to SWAPO, the information that we were given was that they were generally a push-over. There were large elements of them that were pushovers. I remember getting briefings on the whole Sector 10, Sector 20, Sector 30; the SWAPO marines were here; they were guys who had been through some sort of marine training in Russia. We could envision on a map where certain known pockets of strength were based and were meant to be operating, in Angola and further down south. I am also aware that I was only ever there in the dry season, which was not the time for the incursions. The school of infantry training would have been during the dry season, and then they would have encountered contacts in the wet season; the guys up there as Officers and NCOs.

Koevoet: We generally had a healthy respect for them. We saw them and we had interactions with them, from the point of view of them driving past, or them coming along to weapons demonstrations. We had some of them come and talk to us. We noticed that lots of them had R1s rather than the R4s which were meant to be the better firearm for the kind of work that they were doing. Several of them were walking around with AK47s. We also saw the inside of their vehicles, which were stripped down to total utility. In terms of their uniforms and they attitudes; they didn't salute anybody. You could see that these were the real McCoy; the hardened ones. Certainly we didn't relish getting on the wrong side of them. We had a healthy respect for them. They had a reputation for generally going in and breaking things up. We heard stories of some people who had got involved with them in a bar-brawl or something like that, and that it had taken ten other guys to subdue two Koevoet guys. There was a bit of an aura about them. We certainly didn't try and dispute that aura. If you saw them, you didn't get the feeling that it was disputable.

My impression was that a lot of `good' that the regular troops were doing to try and keep the local population even neutral was being undone by Koevoet going in there and stuffing things up; driving through a village and running over a dog, and the odd rape. That was fed to us, not just via the grapevine, but from the top down; if Koevoet were known to be operating in an area, we were not to be seen to be operating in conjunction with them. We should just bale out.

End of 1986: Border Duty

All our training, right up until border phase, was done in overalls. On Thursdays, our sport parade day, you wore browns. Essentially it was overalls all the way through to the Border Phase. After border phase, it was all browns.

When we got back there was very little left to do. We did about three weeks of urban counter insurgency, riot drills with those horrible helmets with the visors and the gas-masks and all that sort of stuff; vehicle movements through open areas. Instead of having a strap that you could sling your R4 over your shoulder, you could now took the one end of the strap, undid it, and tied the loose end around your wrist so that the guy couldn't pull your R4 away - that sort of stuff. `Show of Force' and so on. There was a low-level command and control course, which was effectively looking at discipline, methods of instruction and stuff like that. I can remember that the *aide*

memoir for that was a small A5 sheet. It was a fun course because it was low-key, and everybody was just waiting because after that was the two or three week preparation for the passing out parade, which, when I was there, was a huge thing. I was amazed at how much money was blown. During that time we practised the various marches. It was a whole long weekend.

[Etiquette classes - how to be an officer and a gentleman] Cigars were made available, and we were told the correct way to pass the port and so on. We often used to have port. I enjoyed port even before then. In my second year we probably had three of four formal dinners that didn't involve the troops. I also had to go to formal mess dinners as a platoon commander. By that stage they were divided up amongst the other platoons. We went through that as well.

Why I Stayed Behind At Oudtshoorn

I effectively dealt with the army by keeping my nose clean. Obviously I kept it clean to the extent that I became noticed. By the end of the year I had slid out of being at the top of the middle third to somewhere near the top of the top third. Having gone through the thing of wanting to get off the course, and `pulling though' or however they viewed it, I was nominated as the company's candidate for the unit's nomination of `Most Improved Junior Leader' - they didn't distinguish between NCOs and Candidate officers for that. I had to go through an interview. I didn't get it. An English-speaking corporal got it. We were the two that were short listed for that. I was also nominated for the `Neatest in the Company' or something like that, or my Lootie put me through for that. Another guy who was in the platoon with me was actually the Company's nominee. They got the unit RSM to come through and check the inspection, and I actually ended up giving some of my clothes *pakkies* from the cupboard to Johan Loots because his weren't up to the standard of mine, and that was on the instruction from our platoon sergeant. He came through and said to Loots; `This you keep. This you keep. Go and get Mansfield's of this and Mansfield's of this.' I was tasked to help Johan set this up. He was a very good friend of mine, so it wasn't a problem. It was quite ironic; after me having wanted to get off the course, this is where you end up.

I was also fortunate that, as an English speaker, my Afrikaans is very good. I was often called in to translate a lot of stuff. I kind of got noticed, I guess. And I kept my nose clean. I wasn't physically good, but I kept my nose clean and my marks were good and so on. Towards the end I got the nickname `Minora' - after the razor blades, just within a few guys within the platoon with me. In fact one of the guys who was there with me is in the Parks Board, and he still calls me `Minora' once in a while.

We were called in at some stage and told that to a certain extent we could nominate where we would like to go. You could give your three choices, but there was no guarantee that you would get any one of those. They said to us that; `The situation is such that the Chief of the Army had said that most of us were required for border duty, and that we should brace ourselves that 70 to 80% of us were going to end up on the border for most of the next year.' Although I enjoyed border duty, I had done it under very different circumstances from what the normal operational duty was, so I wasn't keen to

get involved in that. I also knew that I would have six month stints without any passes or anything like that. They called us in and said that this percentage would be going. They said that, because some of us had already gone and done the parabat course or the weapons course, we would go to that allied unit. Military intelligence came along and collected a whole lot of guys. I was told to go along for selection for military intelligence. We did some more psychometric testing. I was quite relieved that they didn't call me in. They said that they would take the best candidates out, and if they needed more they would approach people. They called me through as one of a group of the people they would approach. They started at one end and when they got as many candidates as they needed they sent the rest of us back. I was very relieved, although at that stage you were given the option to turn it down. They didn't want anybody who didn't want to be there. One has to draw a distinction between military intelligence, and what at that stage was getting into civic action. Some of those guys were going into civvy type roles in South West, covert operations. My doubts with normal military service just didn't permit me to go into that sort of stuff. It was more `subversive'.

They then said that they had selected people for Oudtshoorn, and they were going to call those people out, and effectively you had to have a very good reason for not staying behind. It was considered; `you are the cream of the crop, and we are going to keep you here.' I remember my name was called out, and I thought; `I don't want this!' I was hoping to get to Ladysmith, but I also had it in the back of my mind that if I got to Ladysmith, on the same day I could get on a plane and go to the border because 5SAI had guys up on the border and often that was exactly what happened; as the guys came off from Oudtshoorn, they were sent up there so that the other guys could come back down to have their last pass before they were discharged. You could end up spending your Christmas up there.' I thought about how to play it. At least if I stayed in Oudtshoorn, I knew when my passes where, I knew I'd be home for Christmas for a good two to three week chunk. It was a home base, I didn't have to go and learn my way around other places. I knew it was very paraat. I knew there were lots of `side shows'. Things that were designed for image purposes, which didn't have real practical value. Any sort of military bullshit that was designed to make things look better or different from what they really were, were `side shows'. In the general conversation the term would come out. If a guy was reading a particularly intellectual book, for example, when everyone else was lying around reading Louis L'Amour, they would rip him off and say; `Is that a side show?' It was an element of pretensciousness, but not always. In that context it was more of a friendly jibe. The weapons demonstration and the whole passing out show was all `side show'. We spent two weeks practising for side shows. It was a term we used fairly often.

They called us out, and we were given the option. I decided that I would stay. I worked it out later than only about 50% of the guys who left Oudtshoorn actually went to the border, on the sample size that I was able to gather. That was just a `side show' to get the people they wanted to stay behind at Oudtshoorn to say; `Yes. We'll stay behind.' I suppose that was quite sneaky. I must say that I felt quite proud to have been selected to be part of the crew selected to stay behind. It was an honour, but I knew that is wasn't

going to be a particularly pleasant year. It was not as pleasant as it could have been elsewhere. But at least I knew what I was letting myself in for.

Passing Out Parade

On the Friday morning the infantry school exercised their right to the freedom of Oudtshoorn, and the whole of Infantry School marched through town. I can remember that the practise for that was marching through the town three nights before that from about six in the evening. You set off at dusk and you got back after dark, and you did the whole march from the base, through town, and back out again. That march was also broken by going to the local sports stadium where we practised for the still drill demonstration, a whole lot of other things, the band was involved - that all took place at the stadium. On the weekend of the passing out parade, the morning was the exercising of the right to the freedom of the town, the marching through the town.

The Friday afternoon was a weapons demonstration in the training area. Those Milan anti-tank missiles - in those days we were quoted the prices. I remember one Milan missile cost the same as three baby 3-series BMWs. They fired off five or six of them; they fired them off during the practise and they also fired them off during the actual weapons demonstration. We were told that they were weapons that were close to their `sell by' date; that were soon going to pass their shelf-life. They had tanks there, they had Ratels there, they had the whole bang-shoot. They had phosphorous grenades. During my passing out parade, during the demonstration of the LMGs, they actually got one of the MG barrels so hot that it bent, and they had to throw the barrel away afterwards. It was amazing. They had the mortar guys there, the whole bang-shoot! It was really `Raah! Raah!' for all the parents to come and see the stuff. I've still got photos of every coloured smoke grenade being set off all at once so that it looked spectacular; rainbow colour or whatever.

REVISED:

Friday morning was march through town

Friday afternoon was the weapons demonstration with some free time

Friday night started off with this thing at the Stadium.

Saturday morning was the passing out parade. I acted as company commander for the passing out parade, so I got to put my pip on early. That was very gung-ho! And everyone was looking smart.

Saturday afternoon was the weapons demonstration, at about 4 o'clock. I wasn't physically involved in that. Only certain people were physically involved in that. If you weren't physically involved, you were allowed to accompany your parents out to the weapons demonstration. If your parents weren't there, then you marched out to where the weapons demonstration was.

It was a weird feeling driving along in my dad's car, up a road that I was used to running up, or if we were very lucky, be driven up in a SAMIL, to this weapons demonstration.

Then you were given a couple of hours to go out with your parents, but you had to be back that night. We were told that there would be a church parade on the Saturday, and then, depending on where you were going to be sent from there; some guys were leaving already, and other guys could go away with their parents.

Newly promoted 2nd Lieutenant Roy Mansfield and his fiancée, Vivien.

Parade to execrcise the Freedom of Oudtshoorn.

Marching past the officials' dias during the parade.

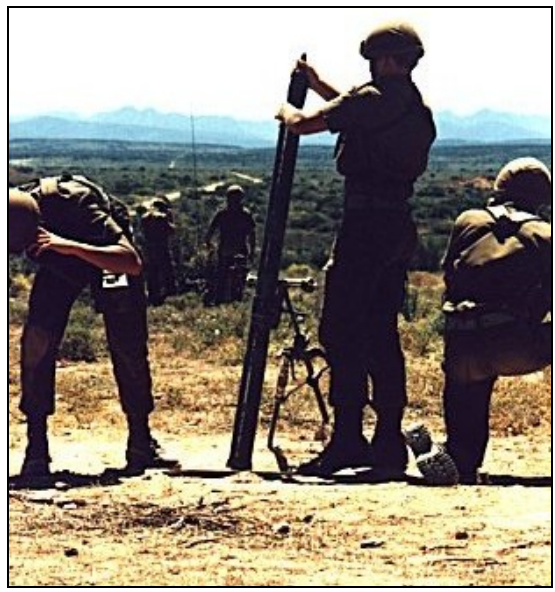
Church Parade

I knew that I was going to be staying behind at Oudtshoorn. I said to my folks that I would be free to leave at four on the Saturday afternoon - Vivi came down with them - they came down on the Thursday and were there for the Friday morning. We had an open visitors session on the Friday afternoon, and then they would spent the night in Oudtshoorn at some chalets, and leave at sparrow's on the Sunday morning and head through to Maritzburg. Then, suddenly, on the Thursday or the Friday, they changed the time of the church parade from 4 o'clock on the Saturday afternoon to 9 o'clock on the Sunday morning, and it was compulsory, so that just blew it. I went along to the company commander, and told him that we had been going to be leaving after the church parade on the Saturday, go as far as PE and stay with friend there, and then head on to Maritzburg, and that this was just going to blow all those plans; we had no accommodation in town. All the accommodation was fully booked; I remember that the army used to run around in circles trying to sort out all the accommodation for the parents. They made as much accommodation available in the officers' mess as possible. It was a silly season. Oudtshoorn just sat back and grinned. You booked weeks in advance for a place in a restaurant, which I had done. Then this whole church parade changed.

He said; `Okay. You can go on the Saturday afternoon after the weapons demonstration.' I thought; `Great! I can now go to town to the restaurant.' Then I thought to myself; `I can't do that anymore. What happens if he walks in, and I'm meant to be in PE? And I'm staying behind as an officer the following year.' Vivien and my folks went to have lunch on the Saturday lunch time, and then we just had a quiet braai there at the chalets that evening, and left at 4 o'clock the next morning to go home.

On the Tuesday or the Wednesday I flew back down to Oudtshoorn. The moment we got back we spent three nights in our own barracks, and we were allowed to go out at night, and do what we wanted to. They had cleared out our platoon commanders, discharged them and sent them home, and then we went into those rooms in the Officers Mess in Oudtshoorn. There was an overlap time when we could go and mix with them, where our platoon sergeants had to salute us. It was great; you could talk to the guy more on an even keel. The Officers mess was great. We lived like kings there. We didn't each have our own batmen, but you put your shoes outside the door and they got polished, and your washing went off and was washed and ironed. I didn't iron a shirt again. It was absolute bliss. We had under cover parking for our cars; we paid for it, but that cost about R 2 per month. Your laundry cost you R 12 a month. You paid mess fees - I can't remember how much - but that included videos, five course meals on a Sunday. I remember the guys bringing their wives, girl friends or parents to the Officers mess for Sunday lunch, which was a five course meal with excellent wine, for about R 3.75 per head. If you think of the resources that went into that lot, it's amazing. It was very comfortable. The officers' mess was quite a distance away from where my lines were in my second year because I had moved to Delta Company which was an NCO company. We weren't allowed to take our private vehicles into the base itself, so we had to walk up in the heat.

Passing Out Parade - Weapons Demonstration



Firing a mortar (right).

Explosion in the distance.

Firing 300 metre flares.

Every platoon commander had a platoon office in the barracks, and we each put a bed in there on the pretence that there wasn't space for it anywhere else, and I just had a piss-poor mattress on it. If we were working there until twelve at night, and we knew that we had to be in the lines at 5 o'clock the next morning, we would go back to the mess for meals, and come back with our shaving kit, and then just change into our clothes the next day. You had a cupboard that was locked and that was never inspected, and you could put your spare set of browns in there. We weren't supposed to do that, but I think that I might have done that on four or five occasions.

The Second Year

Generally the second year was the normal training all over again. You went through the same phases with your troop, but the exception was that none of the NCO companies deployed on the border. They came back early and did an instructors course, in drill instruction and so on. When they did that, it was an absolutely glorious time for the officers, because all the drilling was done by the NCOs. Where we got involved was in evaluating the presentation of their lectures and stuff like that, which could have been quite tedious and boring. By then I didn't have a platoon anymore either. Through attrition, my platoon was disbanded. I took my platoon through the border training phase. The border training was at Oshivello; the transport was slightly different in that we flew straight in to Oshivello.

Selections at Ladysmith

I floated around in the company. The company commander in the second year was Huston-Brown, ex-Rhodesian. He was in the Rhodesian Light Infantry as a lance-corporal medic. He's actually mentioned in one of the Selous Scouts books because he was on detached duty with them, and he got some medal for going out to assist a wounded comrade. He was a nice guy. I had a lot of respect for him. He was a totally professional soldier; not the Afrikaans PF type. He was a totally professional soldier. He left when the pooh hit the fan in Rhodesia, and came down to South Africa. He had done the Rhodesian Formative Officer Training, but he had to do our Officer Formative Training in South Africa, and he was then sent to Ladysmith. Every career infantry officer had, at some stage, to go through to headquarters, which was the Infantry School, to do a stint of duty there as part of being able to show that you had the mettle to carry on. For them it was very intense, those guys were nailed. They were nailed by the colonel who was under pressure; he was put there pending advancement to a brigadier. It was the opportunity to prove that you were capable of promotion; any PF going to Infantry School. This was why the sideshow *paraat*ness came through. We nicknamed him `HB', we never called him HB to his face, but that was his nickname and all his compatriots and seniors called him HB; that was to his face, but not in front of troops or anything like that, but they would in front of us, the officers. In the pub they knew we would hear that. He wasn't into unnecessary sideshow stuff. He actually got rapped across the knuckles because from an appearance point of view, some things weren't flashy enough.

When we went up to the border with the NCOs they were never required to give orders, because they were never going to give orders. We just

used to go through the drills with them. We had to give orders *ad nauseum*. He knew the drill; he'd been up there with 5 SAI. He had all the order *pro formas* Photostatted out so that all we had to do was to fill in the points and the bearings and the points and the numbers and the durations and the intelligence. Everything was done. We had two or three *trommels* that were filled with sawdust that had been coloured with dry powder paints, so that your models looked absolutely professional. These were side shows as far as we were concerned, but I must say that we scored highly in the evaluations because of that. In that sort of scenario, any company commander was always pitting his company against another company to see how they scored points wise. Whether they were an NCO or an officer company. He was fantastic. He backed us 100%. He took flak from the top and never passed it on down to us. He didn't hesitate to hand out extra duties. The officers that stayed behind to continue the second year at Oudtshoorn as platoon commanders; 80% of them were from Bravo Company. The ones that weren't were the exceptional ones from the other companies. You ended up mainly with guys who had degrees and diplomas, so who were all eligible, within a couple of months, to get their second pip. After that time you ended up with only a few one-pippers floating around. We had one one-pipper in our company. His name was Kotze - if you `*kotz*e' in Afrikaans, you vomit. His nickname was `Vomit', or `Vommie' which used to drive him crazy. He was still a one pipper, very young. He was a good officer. I think that if he had stayed on PF he would have been very good. He was very young and had problems in dealing with those of us with more life experience, and of course we were able to wrap him around our little fingers. This guy got extras left right and centre because he just wouldn't learn. There was a time when you shut up and you didn't question what you were being told to do, and invariably he would question it, and he'd get told by HB; `Lieutenant, if you open your mouth again, you are going to get extras.' Vommie would say; `Ah, but Major …' HB would say; `You've got two extras, Lieutenant.' We would just go `Raah! Raah! Raah!' because immediately we got less duties. He either got company extras, or he would get unit extras. We all got a turn to do unit Duties on a roster - it was quite tense. You had to parade around and you had to be awake the whole night, and invariably you had some bloody PF colonel or commandant traipsing around and looking for trouble. The base was never left to relax; there was always somebody checking up somewhere. You would have some Captain coming in and giving you up-hill - this was at Oudtshoorn itself - or you would have parents pitching. It was a big base, and there was always something on the go. You could never have a quiet night. If you were on unit duties you had to go along to all of the companies and sign their incident books, and if there was somebody getting pissed at the canteen you would have to get the MPs in to go and sort it out. It was never the people doing training, it was invariably a driver or a cook or something like that that went along to the canteen and was causing trouble. It wasn't nice to do. It was great to hear that someone else had been given unit extras, especially when you knew that your turn was coming up. All that would happen would be that you would get a message from the Captain's secretary saying that you didn't have to do duty that night. It wasn't transferred to another night, it just happened to be your luck that you didn't have to do that duty ever. So when old `Vommie' had to do unit extras,

that was great! And if anything else happened, he would get company extras, so he would have to do six nights on the trot. We all ended up doing one night a week, and one weekend in however many. Invariably he would get six nights, and what he would do was to wait until the fourth morning, and then he would winge to the major about something, and the major would say; `Are you whinging about doing extras?' And the first few times he would say; `Yes, Major. I am.' And the Major would say; `Okay, you've got 2 extras for doing that.' He just didn't learn. When he started learning, he said to us that he didn't know why he had been so stupid about it. He was quite a character.

There was one guy amongst us who was from an NCO company who had done a business management diploma of sorts, and he got into Bravo Company and he got a second pip, also two or three months after we got ours. He was far more mature, though, and he was able to cope with the fact that there were a whole lot of officers who were two-pippers while he was a one-pipper. Because he reacted, we would nail him just to get that sort of reaction.

In general that second year was great. After I came back from the border, I hung around. HB said to me, you carry a clip-board. If anyone asks you what you're doing, and you have something valid on that clip-board that I'm not going to get into trouble for. He made me the company loss control officer. He could justify that, and for three weeks I got everything correct. I went to the fire hydrant in the company and made sure that the red and white stripes were correct. I measured them all up and got them repainted if necessary. Effectively I was on call just to be there. He felt some sense of loyalty. He told me that I had a choice; he could probably wangle it for me to go to Ladysmith, but he said that if I got to Ladysmith, three days later I would be off to the border, and they would discharge me just before Christmas. This was in about September. He said; `You can do that, or you can *krokadil* - you can lie low here, and lets see how long we can play this game for.' We played that game for about two months, until the end of October, and then the unit commander picked up that we were over-strength for the number of platoons that we had. He said; `HB, why haven't you transferred the extra officer? There are other units that need him.' HB just ducked and dived, so I finished off there. I can remember at one stage, him sending me off to do research in the library, just so that I was doing something so if the colonel nailed him, he could say; `No, I haven't sent him off. I've left it another week because he's doing research for me.' I had to do a research paper in RMS (Correct method of writing) which was a bit tedious, but it was quite fun. We just hung around when our troops went off to do their passing out parade, and shortly after that we were discharged, and I was sent back home.

I had bought a car at the beginning of my second year at Oudtshoorn, and if I wasn't on duty over the weekend, I had a crate in the back of the car that had a grid in it and a gas bottle, and salt and pepper and that sort of stuff, and I would get up and go. It was just over to George and then you were on to the Garden Route, the wilderness area and Knysna. I did a lot of birding there. From that point of view it was very relaxing. I got to know the area like the back of my hand. I used to travel with one or two of the other guys, and it was good fun.

During my year in Bravo Company there were two guys who were teachers who swapped over to Charlie Company to become NCOs. We never

got anyone from Charlie Company. If there was someone in an NCO company who was identified as being officer material, they weren't sent to Bravo Company because of our higher academic status. They were sent to another officer company. In my second year I identified one guy in my platoon who I felt was really of officer material, and I sent him off.

The WOII that was the company sergeant major in Delta Company was Afrikaans speaking. The problem I had with him was more that I was English speaking. There were elements in him of; `These national servicemen don't know a thing.' I do know that he felt very threatened because of the academic qualifications of the two-pip loots. He certainly treated one-pippers with less respect, but also seemed to be more accepting of him because he was younger and wasn't a threat to him. Whereas with us, even if he was just chatting informally in the conference room waiting for the company commander to arrive, it wasn't difficult for us to tie him in knots sometimes. Particularly Ian Cameron and myself who left to go to Grahamstown after about three months because of the attrition; his was the first platoon to be disbanded. He almost used to bait this guy. He kind of asked for it in some ways. I can't remember specific incidents. It was more an English - Afrikaans thing than the; `I'm a PF NCO and you're just a national serviceman lootie, and therefore rubbish.'

Ladysmith

In about January of my second year we travelled up in the train with HB and all the NCOs and everything to Ladysmith. It was like a rerun of going to Oudtshoorn, but now we were going in the opposite direction, and sitting playing cards with our pips on. We went first class and going through to the dining carriage for meals and having to dress up for that, and sitting whiling our time away playing bridge and so on. We often had port, and I probably took a bottle of port along with me in the train. We ended up having port after dinner in the evenings.

We got to Ladysmith. It was HB's old turf. He knew everything there backwards. He knew the Quartermaster, he knew everybody there. During the time that we were there, he said to us officers and NCOs; `If there is any kit that you are short of, now's the time to get it.' We scored kit like you won't believe. I'm wearing army socks to this day that I scored from Ladysmith. Two years ago I took out a pair that were still brand new from Ladysmith. They are brilliant socks. I scored a *grootjas*, and extra *balsak*. I couldn't believe how that wastage occurred. Some of it was legally issued, but the vast majority was illegally issued to us. Of course the records just never got from Ladysmith to Oudtshoorn. We were never nailed for having too much kit issued to us or anything like that.

We worked extremely hard there. We assisted with the intake. I was absolutely flabbergasted by the type of people who came in to a *SAI plaas*. You could say that I had a sheltered existence until then. We had always lived in a middle class to upper middle class area, I went to a middle class to upper middle class school. I had been to varsity. I had never really had much contact with the bottom rung of society, and I got there to find that this is what we were dealing with. I remember my little group that I took through the sausage machine, having one guy who had a standard seven. He was about three or four years older than me. He was married and he had three kids. He wasn't to

sure what his address was. He couldn't remember what his wife's telephone number at work was. He had to get his ID number from a piece of paper every time. He'd got in there late because he had avoided getting called up previously, but they had caught up with him. He couldn't remember what date he had been married. He wasn't on drugs or anything like that, he was just very slow. I expect he hadn't been properly processed when we all had to register when we were sixteen at school. I think that eventually one of his buddies must have told him that he should go along and volunteer. So he went in and they said; `You're far too old. You must have done it before.' Then the whole system started to work and at the age of twenty-seven they told him; `You're off to Ladysmith.' I expect he was a welfare case.

I remember seeing what we called the `*sprinkaaners*' (grasshoppers) at Ladysmith. We never had them at Oudtshoorn. At Oudtshoorn there were coloured gardeners and labourers who were doing that sort of thing, and yet here were these national servicemen walking around in bush hats and tackies and shorts and all they did was mow the whole time. It blew my mind to see that. I remember being on duty one night and having guys throwing epileptic fits and so on. I had never experienced that during my army career until then because they were selected out of the process. It was survival of the fittest. Some guys arrived at Oudtshoorn sporting long hair, and one of the first things that happened was that it got whipped off, but then there were great greasy globs of humanity. I remember being absolutely shattered by this.

Then we went through the whole selection process, the psychometric testing and so on. We did the basics training with them there. By the time that we left with them for Oudtshoorn, they were riflemen. They were no longer recruits. It was a very nice place because HB made it a very nice place. He knew the ins and outs. It was an incredible place to do training in. You would have a thunderstorm every afternoon at that time of the year, so invariably things would get wet. I had three or four raincoats because you would never be sure where you would need one. Would it be in the lines? Would it be up at the mess?

Officer material: I remember that, when it came to motivating why this guy should be moved from an NCO company to an Officer company, I couldn't really put my finger on it. It was more a gut feeling for me personally. Somewhere amongst my army stuff I have information of `The attributes of a good NCO' and `The attributes of a good Officer'. It wasn't something that particularly stayed with me. My perception was that, on the officer side, they were looking for planners and thinkers, which is different from what you get if you think about the Comops course that I've just described. The NCOs were more people who were able to carry out things practically; to follow instructions. It often seemed that the PF guys were trying to make the same distinction between a PF guy and a national serviceman, which is why I think there was often conflict between a national service officer and a PF NCO; `I've got to salute you, but I'm actually better than you because I'm PF.' Now, ten year after having finished my national service, its not something that I've got ingrained in me. It's not something that I'm able to pull out of the murky depths, like being able to take an R4 rifle apart and put it together again.

When we went on our JLs selections, they put a lot of value on being able to select the Officers and NCOs during which psychometric testing played a large part. They reckoned that the selection was done then. Certainly in our first few weeks of the sausage machine, we did those psychometric tests as well. I don't remember there being attrition as a result of the psychometric tests. I don't remember officer candidate being sent on the NCOs course; they were rather RTU'd (Returned to Unit) at that stage. RTU was a sword of Damocles that would be used against you. The further you were into the course, the more you had suffered, and the less you wanted to be RTU'd. They made a big point about the psychometric tests in the early days. When we went up to Ladysmith to do the JL selections; they did the psychometric tests, and when the results came back, they said; `NCO. Officer.' Of the people that I knew and felt that I could assess, I felt that they kind of had it right. Not that I was a boffin at psychometric testing, but we were seldom surprised at whether a person went to an Officer company or an NCO Company. When I say `we' I mean the national service guys; the officers and the NCOs.

You had that opportunity to screen, and within three months there was a further opportunity, and then after another three months there was a second opportunity. After that it became very difficult to switch. By that stage, rather than switch between being an officer or an NCO, the guy was just thrown off the course completely, if there was someone who just wasn't going to succeed at that stage.

I remember having the scores of the psychometric tests, and of PT tests and written tests available to me when it came to making recommendations, and when it came to the panel that decided on the borderline cases, we had to be on call; the platoon commanders, and that the panel included a Dominee, someone from MPI, someone from a different unit maybe, and the company commander, and then maybe the colonel from the Home Unit. It was quite a significant panel. I remember that my two platoon sergeants and I had to be there to come if necessary to speak about a particular person.

HB was trying to mould us together as an officer and NCO corps. We spent a couple of evenings where he got everyone together, when we were at the end of the training. He would say; `Gentlemen. It's five o'clock. At half past five you will all be dressed in civvies, showered and everything. We are going to town tonight. You will need money.' You had no choice. It was like the C's wish. So we would go in to town, and he would know all the restaurants in town, so we would go in to town and have a bit of a blitz in town. He did it a couple of times with the NCOs as well, and on another couple of times he let the Company Sergeant Major do his own thing, and he went off with the officers.

One memorable evening was when we were outside - not quite thrown out of a restaurant, but we had got to the stage where they had said that the kitchen was close, and would we leave. He ordered about three bottles of wine between eight of us but it was too late, so we walked out of there feeling a bit blotto. He had transport lined up. He was just phoning the orderly and saying; `Come and fetch us.' The duty driver would come and fetch us in a SAMIL or in one of those fish-tank type bakkies. In Oudtshoorn, that was never ever done. It was standing instructions that no military vehicle would be sent in to

town to fetch any officer of any rank unless the paperwork had been done before the time. He just went in and organised it that way. The controls were far lighter at 5 SAI. We came out of the restaurant that night, and we were standing there in a parking bay, waiting for the vehicle to arrive. It was an empty parking bay with vehicles on either side, and we were all standing there milling around. A traffic cop came past and saw this bunch of inebriated guys standing around in civvies. He should have clicked that we all had short hair, and worked out what the situation was. The person that he almost bumped into when he tried to stop was HB, who proceeded to give him a bit of lip. So of course he started getting bolshy, and he said something stupid like; `Your taking up a parking bay.' Or something like that. HB just took 5c out of his pocket and put it in the parking meter and said; `I've paid for my parking.' He said to us all; `Come and stand here next to me.' The traffic cops just backed off and drove off.

We went to the Moths there one night. I remember eating pickled eggs at the Moths at about ten at night after we had had too many beers. Braais as well; he would just say; `We are not eating in the mess tonight. We are braaiing here, around the pool.' He made marvellous pepper & mustard sauces for steak. When everybody else was eating whatever in the mess, we would have steaks outside that he had organised from the kitchen. Nobody else would be eating steaks that night. Nobody else had steaks for the next three nights, so he has the sort of muscle to get in there and organise exactly what he wanted. He had lived there before, but his wife was now living down in Oudtshoorn, waiting for him to get back, so he was effectively almost returning to a bachelor state. He took every opportunity. He was very fair then. Ian Cameron and I were both from Maritzburg; he organised our duties up there so that we could get home as many weekends as possible during that time. I think we were up there for five or six weeks. He said to the other guys; `You guys are going to carry the can now for duties, but when we get down to Oudtshoorn, they will pay you back.' We didn't have to ask him for that. He just did it off his own bat. He was very perceptive of the guys below him.

While we were up there I had what was probably the most unpleasant experience of my army career. Right at the end of my time there they gave the guys a pass. We were due to leave the following Wednesday so they gave the weekend as the pass because lots of the guys were from Natal, so they could go home. We had some guys in the company with us who were from the Cape, and they wanted to go home. We tried to persuade them not to because it took a lot of administration to get the guys down to Durban to fly. They were only going to go down to Oudtshoorn, and then they were going to get a pass down there six weeks later. Some of the guys insisted on going, and on the way back, the SAMIL 100 that they were travelling in - a PF NCO was with us at the time, but he didn't last long after that - HB got him out - he was driving back. There was a bit of alcohol involved. The driver hadn't had alcohol, but the NCO in charge was under the weather. On the stretch of road between Colenso and Ladysmith - I never heard the final details -but apparently there was some mechanical fault involved, the diff locked, the brakes were applied and they locked up and the vehicle skidded in an appalling thunderstorm. It hit the side to the road and went over, and landed on top of everybody. We had just got back from a pass. We had to be back by

8 o'clock that Sunday evening. At 10 o'clock HB came rushing through. I was asleep at that stage. He came rushing through and said; `Come!' and off we went. He took one of those fish-tank bakkies and drove like the clappers to this place. I thought that we were going to have an accident. It was still pouring with rain. By then one of those big civilian ambulance buses had arrived and they were hauling ouks out. There were military ambulances there as well. There were two guys killed; both from my platoon. I had known them about six weeks. Both of them were on site. The one guy was still alive when I got there. He died five minutes later. That was traumatic. We carried the bodies through to the police mortuary van. I didn't get much sleep that night.

The next day I had to go to the cop shop to identify the bodies again; to confirm their identities and so on. There were also guys in the hospital and I had to go and check who was there and who was missing, who was just late from a pass, and all that sort of thing had to be sorted out. I knew by then that it was these two guys. I recognised them straight away. I pulled my files with all their details; their next of kin and everything.

I had to go and identify the bodies, and when I got there, they had swapped the labels for the two. I had to go all the way back to get my two platoon sergeants, so that they could certify in addition. The cops weren't happy to swap toe-tags at that stage. We had to go through the whole thing of affidavits about swapping them around and that sort of thing.

The one guy, apart from a little blood around the nose, there wasn't a mark on him. The other guy had the back of his head bashed in. He was the guy who was dead when I got there so I didn't see too much of him. They had cleaned him up by the time that I got to see him again.

We then travelled down to Oudtshoorn on the Tuesday or the Wednesday by bus; those big Alwierda busses. Off we went. We got down there. There was no time for anyone from our company to be involved in the from the military funeral point of view. The parents of both those two boys had decided to opt for military funerals. I attended the military funeral with a black armband. It was an eye-opener for me. I just attended. I wasn't part of the whole parade; the gun carriage and the slow marching. Of course while we were travelling down, another platoon down at Oudtshoorn was being trained up to be able to perform this duty. I had to attend, and I had to go and draw leather gloves, a black armband, the whole bang-shoot! I was called in by the adjutant and he told me what would be happening and what my role was. I wasn't instructed to go, but they asked if I would go, having been their Officer Commanding. HB wasn't going to go because things were hectic for him at that stage. I think that the highest ranking officer who attended was a brigadier, on behalf of the South African Defence Force. I was the Company's representative going through. I was there for both funerals, and each time I took one of my platoon sergeants with me.

In a military funeral they bring the coffin and the body in to church. You then go off to the cemetery, slow marching, the whole bang-shoot! I was involved in that. Then, at the grave, after the civilian part of it is done, the coffin is lowered into the grave, and, starting with the most senior officer, and working down, you march up to the foot of the grave and salute. Once all of the officers have gone, then all the NCOs present go. The one wasn't as traumatic as the other one.

The chap's surname was `Marlow'. I think it was Johan Marlow. It was on the Saturday morning that I went through. His brother was in the SAP, just as a constable. He had to wait until all the officers and NCOs had gone. He had been standing next to his parents, and when he marched around, he got halfway to the grave, he just burst into tears and threw his police hat into the grave, and then he ran off to where the cars were. That was hell of a distressing.

I then went along afterwards to the church where the teas and eats were being served. Both times I went up to the parents, introduced myself and told them who I was etc. It's difficult. What do you say to a parent like that? You haven't even got to the stage where you can say; `I spent eight months with him. He died bravely in the face of enemy fire' or anything like that. You just go along and say; `This is who I am. I knew him such a short time. I just want to tell you that he had been selected for JLs , and was on his way to becoming a fine NCO'. That's about as much as you can do. They were very appreciative about that.

At that stage the Marlow boy's parents said to me; `His watch. Could that please be given to one of his friends in the platoon.' They said to me; `You'll know who they are.' They had given it to him for Christmas, and that was what they had wanted. I said that I would go and check up on that.

Thinking back I couldn't remember seeing a watch amongst his personal possessions. You must imagine; all these guys were travelling back with extra kit and stuff. All of their stuff had been scattered. We had had to go back the next day during daylight hours. We had posted guards there, and we went back to collect all of the stuff. It was horrendous. There was kit scattered everywhere in the velt. Then you had to come back and try to put all of the kit back together, and a lot of the stuff was unidentifiable, and then the guys would come and claim, and then what was left, you would get the guys who were close friends, and say; `Do you recognise this as being this guy's stuff.' That was all packaged and sent down.

I went back to HB and I said; `This has been requested.' He said; `Sure. It's not a problem.' We couldn't find the watch. In the meantime, his beret had been handed to his mother. She flipped. It came through on the Monday. She had flipped because it wasn't his beret. His beret had been muddy or bloody or whatever, so they had taken another beret, a clean one, put a *bok-kop* badge on it for the coffin. She had, on that pass, sewn it so it pretended to form. So she knew that it wasn't his, and she wasn't happy with that at all. To this day I still do not know whether his actual beret was found. I think they may have explained the circumstances, and that may have placated her. I didn't get too involved.

Then the SAP ended up laying a charge of theft against HB. This was for the theft of the watch because he was the commanding officer, and responsible for that. Of course, when this happened, we had to go back to Ladysmith. I remember having carried Marlow's body to the mortuary there. I wasn't too sure about whether the watch had been on his arm or not. I wouldn't have been paying attention. My affidavit was that as far as I could remember there had been a watch on his wrist, but, words to the effect that I hadn't been paying enough attention to be absolutely certain about it. To the best of my knowledge, that watch had never been in our possession, at all. It

had never come out with any stuff. I had been involved in collecting the stuff (his personal effects?) and the only time that Huston-Brown could have been involved with it, would have been at the point when all the stuff had been collated and was in boxes. So certainly, he wasn't responsible. I think that this eventually went to court, so he could explain - don't know how much `pull' this chap's father had. This all made it very distasteful.

That was the worst unpleasantness that I had to deal with as far as losing troops was concerned. There was a guy who ended up doing chemistry honours at the same time that I was doing zoo. honours here. He did the Infantry Officer training course, and then he went and did a Company weapons course which involved the mortars and everything. He ended up being deployed on the border in charge of the mortar section, and in one case I think he lost eight or nine troops in one fell swoop during a mortar attack. He never spoke about it and we were very close. He had done HDE with me. He wasn't one of the guys who travelled down on the train with me, but I knew him from then. I just heard about it via the grape vine. He's never been able to talk about it to me. I count myself lucky at not having had to cope with that sort of grief.

Second Year As A Platoon Commander

I came across some NCOs that thought that an officer out of Officer school didn't know anything, but not from the NCOs who ended up at Oudtshoorn. They were the ones at Ladysmith or on the border or places like that. At Oudtshoorn they made the distinction between someone who had done hard time on the border and a national serviceman. One guy springs to mind who was a sergeant. He had been about to be promoted from a staff sergeant to a WOII. He was one of those that wore cammo berets, 32 Battalion, and he had taken a thousand foot flare and had hit a troop over the head with it. It went off and injured both him and the troepie. He ended up being demoted to sergeant. Then he came to Oudtshoorn to redeem himself so that he could work his way back up again. I remember him being a first class soldier as well. He was Afrikaans speaking. You could see he was battle-hardened. There were no side shows about him. He was a great one for ripping off the side shows. His attitude was; `This is a side show that we've got to put up with. Let's get it over and done with.' Then he would say; `This is a side-show, and this is how we would really do it if we were up on the border.' He had that sort of attitude.

How well prepared were you to command in a combat situation? I was conscious of the fact that I had been through training that said; `This is how you do things.' That would be changed by what I received on the border. I know that if I had got to the border, one of my first tasks would have been to find out which side shows I could leave behind, and that I should forget about. I was also conscious of the fact that if I went to the border, I would end up having to deal with a totally different class of troop from what I was used to, who after all were going to become NCOs. I didn't feel that my training had adequately prepared me to cope with that sort of stuff. With us, discipline was rammed down your throat. You had to be disciplined in order to get through the course. That was a very strong motivation to keep your nose clean. I was concerned about how I was going to deal with someone who was just going to

1987 Delta Co. – Night exercise. Ratels firing (right) and fiery tail given off by an anti-tank rocket launcher. (below)

Firing a mortar from a Ratel (right) and a command Ratel firing its 20 mm cannon, surrounded by supporting infantry (below).

go out and get pissed regardless of the consequences. I didn't know how I would deal with that sort of scenario. I wouldn't look forward to that with great relish.

From the military operations point of view, I think, apart from wanting to drop the side-show issue, I felt reasonably confident that I would be able to handle most situations.

Platoon Commander Of Troops Doing Border Duty

Something that does come to mind is that when I was up in my second year, our NCOs went through exactly the same training as we did, and we also had to do night ambushes and all that with them. After you had done the night ambush, you withdrew to a rendezvous point about 2 ks away , which was left guarded with two or three troops. There was a specific challenge procedure, and you had to know the password, so the guys who were waiting there, if the saw dark figures appearing in the night, they could know that they were on your side. I had a platoon orderly who I had appointed who was supposed to be walking in front of me, then the platoon commander, and then the rest of the platoon behind you, and then right at the back the platoon sergeant coming through to bring everyone home. My orderly was useless. His night vision was pathetic. The guys were rotated through being orderly. Eventually I said; `Ag! Get behind me.' and I took over. I could see that I was approaching a clump of bushes with the correct features, and as I got closer I didn't hear him challenging as he was supposed to. All I heard was a firearm being clicked from safety into fire position. That was not meant to happen. I soiled myself. In my second year there had been some activity between the two times that I was up there, and there was rumoured to be someone out there. You just didn't take chances. When this guy realised what was happening, he called; *`Dis ek, Luitenant!'* I was on the ground, rifle on `fire', ready to shoot, when he realised just that. If I had fired, the dark patch that I was going to shoot at was him. Needless to say, I grilled him the next day. He got a sandbag of note! In full view of the rest of the platoon. I didn't have a problem with that afterwards, because the guys behind me had also been starting to react, and knew the consequences. This guy was very contrite about it. You had done so many of the drills so often that I felt confident in myself that a lot of that stuff would have happened almost automatically. Once you hit the situation, I think a lot of that would have happened automatically, in terms of going through the drill.

It was also instilled in us during the whole thing that the South African Defence Force had the upper hand. They certainly had at that stage from a conventional point of view. There was no doubt about that. I think they suffered more losses up there than we were ever told about, but I think at that point, things were looking good. That keeps you going as well. I think I was fairly well prepared.

Adaptation To Civilian Life

I certainly felt relief at having done it, and leaving. I think we were discharged on about the 20th of December. By the 17th of January I was due to go teaching at Greytown. My life was sorted out for me. I didn't have to try to organise anything. I just used that time to touch base and make contact with

everybody. I spent time with the family and got things ready for Greytown. I didn't find myself at a loose end.

Camps

I got a couple of callups while I was teaching at Greytown, but because of my teaching commitments, I got off those. They were deferred. This was when I was doing environmental education for the Department of Education and Culture.

I was credited with having done two camps, although one was just a three-day camp. I arrived on the Friday afternoon. We went to Natalia and were lectured on - there was some committee that was designed to co-ordinate the activities of the police, the army, the emergency services, the provincial governments. It included civil defence. I know that when I went to the department of Education and Culture afterwards, my boss there was still involved in those committees. It was really just co-ordinating the civvies with the military, so that if anything happened from a revolutionary warfare point, there was some sort of co-ordinated structure in place. Some guys involved in that updated us on the latest developments. It was dealing with settlement patterns in Natal. We were then sent home for the Friday night. On Saturday morning we had to go back, and there was kit issue. On Saturday afternoon we had to get back at Natalia regiment at 5 for drinks, which our wives could attend if they wished to.

Then we were bused up to the Hilton Hotel and we had a formal dinner. The formal dinner was far more the type of informal dinner that I imagine it would have been in the British Army. At Oudtshoorn it was very formal and very stiff upper-lip. There was always a guest speaker who was always an honorary colonel from some other regiment or some other military high up who was attending in uniform. There was a tradition at the Natalia regiment that a junior officer had to go in and in the course of the evening tie his shoe laces together by the time he got up to speak. I can remember being very lucky being a two-pip loot because all the one-pip loots names were put in a hat. Whoever it was knew that they would be disciplined if they were caught. It was one of those rights of passage things that had to be done. There was a church parade on the Sunday Morning that was `compulsory'. I don't think anyone attended because they were still suffering from the after effects of the formal dinner.

Then I got another one, a month long camp to Group 9 headquarters in Pietermaritzburg, as Ops. Officer. We got there and we spent three days there; there was myself and two other national service campers. One of them was a lawyer who had done all the law stuff and then gone off to the army. He was old and he was starting to get grey hair already. At that stage it was still three years since I had done army service. None of the guys my age were starting to show grey hair, so it was quite strange to have such an *`ou man'* on this camp with us. That was very *rustig*. You were one of the few officers around. At Oudtshoorn my experience was that there were so many officers around that you were the equivalent of a one liner anywhere else. There was a short service lootie, a one-pipper who was actually the ops officer for the group. Our role was to act in support of him to provide after hours ops officer functions. After three days we knew all the drills, and knew what was

involved with all the stats and all the reports that had to be sent off. The SA Operations called us in. He was a major, and he said; `There are four of you. I don't care how you do it, but daytime or night time, if I walk into this ops. Room, one of you is there. Go out, talk about it, draw up a plan about how you are going to deal with it. Present me with the plan, and then get on with it. We decided that we would, for a week, and then be off for a week, then do twenty-four hours on, twenty-four hours off again. He said; `That's fine.' But we were not to sleep there. We swapped over duties at seven in the morning. In the first week I did three days, and then I went home for a week - I was off for military service duties so it was like a holiday. The only proviso was that if they needed extra manpower, they knew where to contact us. So if I wanted to go to Midmar for the day I would just phone and say; `I'm not contactable by phone, but I'm up at Midmar.' Then I went back for a week and I did four days, and then you went home for a week again. That was a camp. Beautiful! Fantastic! During that time there was a rat-pack for you, so you didn't need to worry about food. I would have had breakfast before seven in the morning, and Vivien used to bring me supper there, or she would go and buy Kentucky Fried Chicken and come and eat Kentucky Fried Chicken with me.

We slept as well. Behind the Ops. Office desk, I just rolled out a blanket and I had a pillow there. You had to go through the signals room to get to the ops office; there was a one-liner or a two-liner there, and you would say to him; `You're in trouble if I'm sleeping and anybody above the rank of a two-pip loot walks in.' So generally we sat there and handled the radios and the phone calls until tenish at night, watched a bit of TV and there would be a video there, and then I went and kipped until four the next morning, and then I got up in case the OC came in. That was it.

I've had a letter saying that we are no longer required to do military service, but would I consider doing voluntary military service. I enquired as to what our involvement would be. It would be keeping the ANC apart from the IFP so I turned that down, thank you very much.

Chapter Sixteen

‘Daniel’
6 S.A. Infantry 1987 - 1989
Sector 10, Eenhana

Daniel reported for National Service in August 1987, pleased to have been called up to the Air Force. Almost immediately he was reassigned to 6 SAI (Grahamstown), where he did basic training, and tried out unsuccessfully for the section leader’s course. He went on to serve in Sector 10, Eenhana and was present during the SADF withdrawal from South West Africa - Namibia.

Prior To Reporting For National Service

I do not come from a very military family. My name, Daniel, a good family name, I share with my father and an uncle of his, who died in action during the (Second) Boer War. My father was never drafted, but his brother, my uncle, was. He was quite involved in military things. The first military rifle I remember seeing was his R1. I remember a visiting cousin showing my father the scars on his elbows, acquired from leopard crawling in Oudtshoorn.

With high school came cadets, of course. The most important part was parade ground drill. I bore the unprofessionality of that for a year, and the next year I joined the 'drill platoon', that took part in the regional competition. I was chosen as a kind of reserve. Half way through the next year I left the platoon, because of a clique-ishness that started among the hostel-living members of the platoon. I was also getting tired of being made fun of.

During that year, all boys turning sixteen that year were called to one classroom and given registration forms for National Service. I received my force number on my sixteenth birthday.

This paragraph is about my academic career, but it has a major bearing on my national service. I left school at the end of that year, and enrolled at a correspondence college, to write my Matric at the end of that year. During 1986 I stayed at home, and studied for my Matric. At the end of that year I passed the National Senior Certificate examination with matriculation exemption, but I had failed at mathematics, obtaining a final mark of 32% in that subject. This also barred me from the re-examination, 40% being the minimum. Since I had always had in mind a career in science or engineering, I had to wait for the examinations at the end of the next year. The defence force, not getting my proof of registration as student at the required date, called me up to report on the 4th of August 1987 at the Air Force Gymnasium, Valhalla, Pretoria.

I was very glad to be called up to the Air Force. I knew it meant a less harsh life than in the Army, and that I would be able to study there. It also meant that I would be close to flying and aircraft, which I had loved (from a

distance) all my life. I do not know why I was assigned to the Air Force; I've always had the idea that one had to have special abilities to be assigned there.

There was always the debate about whether one should study first, or go to the army first. I had come to the conclusion that, to have a nice time in the army, one had to study first, and to be successful at study one had to go to the army first. Since I was more interested in study than in the army, my inclination was to the latter. During my national service, my sister, then at University, told my mother that the first year male students who had gone to the army after school were better and nicer; more mature than the third year students of the same age. Today I would say that, unless one were to become a lawyer, a doctor, or a minister, going to the army first is the better option.

(I will keep to the following convention: "the army" or "going to the army" means National Service, or the Defence Force. "The Army" as fighting arm of the SADF of SANDF will be capitalised. This was the spoken language, also in Afrikaans.)

I did not try to evade national service. I knew it to be a duty, as I was taught at school and Sunday school. Nobody I knew tried to evade, possibly because of social pressures, but also possibly because I knew very few people.

In preparation for National Service, I took to cycling as a way of getting fit. I cycled a distance every day trying to get my pulse rate above 60% of maximum for 20 minutes every day, as the book said. I also did sit-ups, pull-ups and push-ups. I do not know if it did me any good, but I know it was necessary. During all my years at school I never played at any sport, and did not do any kind of exercise that was not forced on me. This meant that I was not fit enough for the army.

Together with the call-up instructions, the army sent me a booklet called *Diensplig*/National Service 1987. It was sponsored by many advertisers, and contained a lot of information on what to expect during national service. This very informative booklet told one everything one needed to know. The most important was a list of what to bring along. The official list was very short. My mother was very helpful in making me pack, for she would insist on me taking things I would have left behind. I was glad of every one of them.

Before the call-up the Air Force invited my parents and I to an information day at the Air Force Gymnasium. There the Commanding Officer and others gave talks on what to expect. We were told that the bulk of the intake would be trained in airfield security, since the air operations depended on irreplaceable aircraft. Afterwards some refreshments were served, during which time we could talk to the officers. My mother talked to one of the chaplains. My father talked to the CO about studying.

My best preparation for the army was the *Voortrekkers*. This is a youth organisation for Afrikaner schoolchildren, something like the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. During school holidays in the autumn and spring they offered camps, mostly teaching fieldcraft and campcraft. This was a introduction to living in tents, queuing for food, and sharing bathrooms. I was never taught to pitch a tent in the army, but it wasn't needed, for I already knew. (The easiest way to pitch a tent is the way I was taught in the *Voortrekkers*. It is also the one way guaranteed to get it tight the first time.) Putting black stuff on my face was no novelty for me during basics. *Voortrekker* leaders had often been to the army and applied what they had learned at these camps. The Defence

Force knew that, and readily supplied tents and water carts for these camps. It was part of the total defence against the total onslaught.

Reporting For National Service

The morning of the day my father took me to report for National Service, my mother gave me a fried egg for breakfast. I tasted that egg in my mouth all the way to Pretoria. I was very scared, very lonely, and very, very young; I was still more than a month away from my seventeenth birthday. When we got to the Gymnasium, there were a lot of cars, and people everywhere. I said goodbye to my father, and walked to the enclosure where NSM were to report. Somebody in uniform stopped me and asked to see my call-up instructions. I took it out of my bag and showed it to him. I felt it took too long to get it out, but he just looked at it and let me through. At least the first thing went right. I went and sat on the stands overlooking the sports field. It was August in Pretoria, and quite cold, but a sunny day. On some kind of command we formed up in lines on the field. It must have been alphabetically, because the names in our flight all started with letters between H and P. We then went into a hangar, were we were asked our force numbers for the first time. Mine was quite easy: 85474849. After a few more times of giving force numbers and other information a group of us were formed up in threes, and a corporal was told "This is yours!"

We were in 5 Squadron, 3 Flight. If memory serves, we were about 25 to a Flight and 10 Flights to a Squadron. Our first flight commander was Corporal Blom. He was quickly known as *"Blommetjie"* [Little flower] or Flower Power. I cannot remember much about him, except that he disliked me (I think), and that he made someone climb up a tent middle-pole and stay there, for punishment. He was soon promoted to admin to do administration, and was replaced by a junior instructor named Strauss.

In the Army, a platoon or troop is commanded by an officer, with the aid of a platoon sergeant. In the Air Force, during basic training, the flight commander is a PTI [Physical training instructor] with rank of corporal. The platoon sergeant's role is in a large measure taken over by the "Bungalow Bull", a member of the flight chosen by the flight commander to represent the flight . He is more than a spokesperson, and to some extent responsible for the flight's discipline, but receives no recognition for it. Ours was called Landman, a blonde chap with somewhat of a beak nose. He had already been to University, but came to the army when a number of his close friends died within a short time. A professor then suggested that he go to the army to settle himself. I met him again the day I went to hire the gown for my honours graduation. He received his Bachelor Degree at the same ceremony.

The PTI's that acted as our Flight Commanders were all short and thin. The reason for this is, I think, that the PTI training course is very strenuous. Only small men, with a high endurance quotient, were able to pass.

We must have been issued our *trommels* that same day, because we slept in our beds that night. The *trommel* [steel trunk] was standard in both the Air Force and the Army. It contained bedding (sheets, blankets, pillow and pillowcase) and eating utensils (*pikstel, varkpan, spoegbakkie* and cup.) With it, you were an inhabitant of a base. Without it, you are in transit or operational.

The next ten days were spent in administration, and forms and things. It took us some days to be issued with kit other than our *trommels*. Our clothes became very dirty, because only one set was recommended for clearing in. One chap remarked that he "didn't normally wear red and orange together." During this time we were much engaged in cleaning and smartening things up. One thing I can remember, and did not appreciate until later, was that the sandbags in the Gymnasium were filled with cinders, the stuff that's left after coal has been burned. When wet, those sandbags became square in a jiffy, and stayed that way. They were also much lighter than soil-filled ones.

The kit issue was very well organised. When the time came, everyone was given a form, on which all items of clothing and kit to be issued was listed, and on which he had to fill in his name and number. We then went to the tailor, where you gave the form to a clerk, got on a stand, and were measured. The tailor called out the measurements, the clerk wrote it down in the appropriate places, you got down from the stand, were given the form and fell in outside. At the QM stores you were given your kitbag with the standard issue already in it. When you got to a hatch the storeman took your form and fetched the clothing of the correct size for you. You dump the stuff into the bag, and move to the next hatch. At the end of the store you have all the clothing of the correct size. Outside the store, inside the stores compound, were rows of tables. You went to a table and emptied your kitbag on the table. A man (a SM?) stood on the veranda with a similar kit issue. He called out the name of each item, held it up into the air. You found the item on the table, held it up into the air, and waited until everybody had found it. If somebody did not have the item, it was sent for. You then put it in the bag. This was repeated until the last item had been handled. Before you left the compound, you signed the form and handed it in. This procedure, even if it takes a little time, ensures that everybody has been issued with all the equipment, that everything fits him, and that he has heard the name of every piece of equipment. Woe betide the man who got the wrong size, for it took quite a time to get things exchanged.

We spent one whole day doing HSRC [Human Sciences Research Council] tests, to determine where we would be most effectively utilised.

We spent half of one day talking to the welfare people.

Medical examinations took half a day. I passed G1K1, perfectly healthy. I still do not know exactly what the other classifications means. I might have been G3 on grounds of eyesight, but I forgot to tell the doctor I could not read beyond the first line without my glasses, and the medic who took the test didn't notice.

After medical classification, there was some shuffling of people around the squadrons. G3's and G4's were sent to other squadrons, and people from the transit camp came to fill their places. G5's were sent home.

One night a chap in our flight had an epileptic fit. I am not sure whether he had hoped to hide it, or whether it was his first attack. Shortly after clearing in, his girlfriend left him, and he heard that his father had cancer. I was looking at him at the time, and saw him jump over his bed, for no reason at all. He then fell down on the floor, convulsing. When he banged his head on the door, we tried to restrain him, for there was to much furniture around, but

it was not easy. Somebody ran to the sickbay to fetch a medic. We did not see him again after the ambulance took him away.

After kit issue, Blommetjie ordered us to wash and dry all our clothes before the following day. We had to iron them dry, of course. He then showed us how to iron them. We had to use starch. That night, as on some others, a Coloured volunteer came to our bungalow. He gave us much information on what to expect. He also expertly ironed the clothes of two of the guys, for which they paid him. When Blommetjie came to inspect us the next day, he was not satisfied with "their" ironing.

As recruits, we were not allowed to wear blue uniform at all. We detested the bushats, as we were not allowed to wear the blue flight cap, like the instructors.

Blommetjie left us after a while, promoted to squadron HQ. In his place we got a more junior instructor, Cpl. Strauss.

We were issued rifles on the 13th of August. It was H&K G3's, called the R2 by the SADF. The butt of the rifle is fixed to the receiver with two pins. When one of the pins is removed and inserted halfway, from the wrong side, you can hook it into your trouser pocket to take some of the weight when carrying it shouldered.

Basic training started on the 17th of August. On this day we received some instruction on rank and saluting (*salueer en eerbewys*), some on gunnery (*skietkuns*), and our first drill training. '*Tree aan in drie geledere, beweeg! Na die kant van die paradegrond, beweeg*!' for two or three hours.

On the 18th, during morning parade, the OC gave the floor to a commandant from the Army. He was the 2IC of 6 SAI, Commandant Boshoff. He told us about the needs of the Defence Force, more people being needed in the Army than the Air Force, and that 400 of us were to be transferred from the Air Force to the Sixth South African Infantry Battalion. He then read out the names from the list. It was a cruel list. The names was ordered alphabetically, but in sections; it went from A to Z several times. I think my name was called out in the second section, and after that I didn't listen any more.

During the next few days, there much hustling. During the day we were separated from the airmen now undergoing training, but still lived in the same squadron. (We still had to run around the bungalow in 20 seconds when Cpl. Strauss was not satisfied with our inspection.)

The list was shortened somewhat; Jews were excused, as there was no Kosher kitchen at 6 SAI; recruits with family in high places were reprieved. (One chap in my flight was much disgusted when his transfer to the infantry was cancelled, because there "is much more chance to get rank.") Everybody who could, tried to get out. On the second or third day Cmdt. Boshoff gave us a talk on how Grahamstown was a normal town, and the facilities the base offered.

We had to give back all our blue pieces of uniform. During the last day or two we walked around without belts; we had been wearing our blue belts, made for the "step out" uniform, with our browns, for web-belts had been out of stock when we were issued.

We left Valhalla on the Saturday the 21st of August and travelled to Grahamstown in Elwierda's buses. We were accompanied by corporals and

Lieutenants with strange insignia and strange rifles: this was the first time I saw an R4-rifle. It was a long journey, and I slept all the way. We arrived at the base after dark, got supper, divided into platoons and were issued our trommels. I came to sleep in a cubicle, one of four small rooms apart from the main hall of the bungalow, which I shared with a black-haired guy, Shane Burger.

Sunday was devoted to getting settled in. We were shown how to make a bed. We were all allotted to C-Company. I landed in Platoon 2, with Platoon Commander Lt Muller, and Platoon Sergeant Corporal Swart.

Monday was kit issue day. We had to exchange the few things we still had from the Air Force for real military stuff. Our AF kitbags were of cotton with a drawstring at the top: the Army ones were watertight with a metal clip closure. Our AF browns trousers were exchanged for the Army style with leg pockets and a double seat and knees. The Army bushjacket had a set of four patch pockets instead of the AF two let-in pockets. Webbing was now a personal issue, not loan issue.

We were forbidden to wear headdress of any other kind than doibies, the plastic liner of the *staaldak*, and we mourned our bush-hats.

Our rank was changed from Airman to Recruit.

Some differences between Valhalla and Grahamstown:

Food: the food was not as good. The Air Force gave soup and dessert with every lunch (and supper ?); the Army dessert only on Sundays, and infrequently during the week. Only two slices of bread in the Army; unlimited in the Air Force. On the other hand, each company had its own mess, so queuing was not as long. Washing up facilities were variable in the Army, but excellent in the Air Force.

Training: I had a definite feeling of greater professionalism in the Army. We came to be trained, and there was much less shunting around for no apparent reason. You were always punished for something specific, and mostly reasonably.

Clothes: We were not allowed to wear civvies at all. The Air Force issued white towels and underclothes, while in the Army everything was brown.

Ironing: The Army, very sensibly, did not require starching of clothes.

On Tuesday we started training. In three weeks we had to fit in all the training the other platoons did in five. We did it, but it was hard. Reveille was at 5:00, as for the other companies, but PT, the last training period of the day, was after hours. After supper, we often had a lecture. 'Orders' in the evening lasted from some time after the lecture to close to bedtime. Lights-out was at 22:15.

After three weeks of this, we had our first evaluation. Our platoon sergeant was very good at parade ground drill, and our platoon's drill squad got the best score in the unit for drill. We had caught up with the other companies. After that it went easier, but no less strenuous.

Shortly after our arrival at Grahamstown, a call was sent to the company for volunteers for H-company. This company was used as a selection course for Junior Leaders. The recruits in this company had a hard time. Training was never stopped for rain, as ours was. The successful candidates were sent to the Infantry School at Oudtshoorn. As I was still very confused and very

unhappy, I did not even think of volunteering. The dark picture sketched by our platoon leaders of what awaited them did not help much either.

After our first evaluation, volunteers for Section Leader training were called for. One evening during orders, when the Platoon Commander again told us what Section Leaders did, and about the advantages, (Louis) Kruger made the remark that 'the best rank is no rank.' Lt. Muller immediately pounced on that, and told him all about ambition and things. Kruger volunteered. So did I.

On Saturday 12 September all volunteers for section leaders were taken to the mess. There we were told, in "army language" how hard the course was going to be. All who were not interested was asked to leave, and the remainder were given questionnaires to complete.

On Tuesday we had no training. The first thing that happened was that each volunteer got a number written on his staaldak. For the duration of the selection we were referred to by number. The idea was, I think, to remove favouritism and prejudice from the selectors, rather than to dehumanise us. Next we wrote HSRC tests and were individually interviewed by the course leader, Capt. Kelly-Gliddon, and doctors. During my interview I clearly let the Captain understand that I wanted to study, and that I was not sure that his course would leave me enough time for that. I also told him that I did not think I was fit enough to pass the selection. Then he asked me "Are you a Christian?" I said; "Yes, Captain." "Do you believe?" "Yes, Captain." "Then, of course, you don't have a problem." I had no answer to that. Late that evening we were taken to the mess, and wrote tests on the theory that we had done to date. People who did not want to participate were again asked to leave, but this time NOT 'with no questions asked.' The one or two who did want to leave were made to stand on chairs, so that the others could see what a loser looked like.

Later the evening, back in the company lines, Staff Ferreira, C-Company's training NCO, told us what to take along when the physical part of the selection started. I am not sure if he meant us well or ill. We took much more than we needed, weighing us down. If everything he thought we needed was necessary, we would have been sorry without it.

Wednesday morning we went down to the A-Coy parade ground. We were given "black-is-beautiful", with which we had to cover our hands and faces. We were divided into syndicates of 21. Each syndicate was given a staff-sergeant selector. (These were to be the SL course platoon sergeants.) The blackened faces and numbers were more to disguise individuals from the selectors than to bother us, I think.

As first task, each syndicate was given 2 tarred poles, an outer tyre (Land Rover, I think), and a 44 gallon drum with three firebuckets of water in it and no plug. These we had to take to Springs, 7 kilometre down the road out of the north gate. We were under specific rules: all the water had to be in the drum when we got there; the first and the last members of the syndicate were not to be more than 50 metres apart. All this was to be done by a group of people that had met each other not more than fifteen minutes earlier.

The first step was to seal the drum. That was easily accomplished with some spare bootlaces and a plastic bag. We then made a contraption where we carried the drum on the two poles, but abandoned it soon. In the end we

carried the poles and the drum separately, making extensive use of our toggle ropes. It was definitely not a well thought-out plan.

I think a photograph of myself during this task was published in the unit magazine. Because of the black faces, I am not sure.

At the end of the task we dumped the drums, poles, tyres and *'grootsakke*' on a truck trailer, and were sent on the next stage, a 4 kilometre march to the shooting range. The water remaining in the drums was not measured. Arriving at the shooting range, we shot five shots from the standing position on *'valplate'*. Lunch was a single tin of food, without a label, shared among three; it turned out to be meatballs and spaghetti. We also had a chance to fill our waterbottles.

After lunch we were chased to the far end of the shooting range, and put two to a pole, which we had to carry 6 kilometre to the Leopard's Dam with webbing and rifle. (Apparently there still are leopards in those hills. The unit's beret badge features a leopard.) Again, I had not seen the guy I shared the pole with before, or after. After a first short distance he started moaning, and would not carry it on his shoulders like a man. In the end we dragged it with our toggle ropes.

The next task was per syndicate again. We were given 3 drums, 6 poles, 1 paddle and two lifejackets, and told to build a raft to carry 6 people (4 on the raft and 2 swimming) and their webbing across the dam. The officers had a inflatable boat, with which they tried to wet the passengers on the raft.

By now it was late afternoon, and the next task was, simply put, to go to bed. Bed was on the other side of the mountain, at Penn Rock. It was a 6 kilometre forced march in full kit, again per syndicate.

It got dark along the way.

Here I almost got a black mark against my name: At the dam, before we started, we had to get our *'grootsakke'* from the truck. Things got mixed up, and I ended up with a grootsak that was not my own. (I did complain, but to no avail. Lesson: Mark your kit!) The real owner of the bag, the sod, had not yet learned that you rolled the sleeping bag differently for going to the field than for inspection: wider than the bag, rather than the same width. During the march, the roll progressively collapsed. There was no chance of stopping, no chance to fix things up. When the whole thing finally collapsed, I cursed the man loudly and wholeheartedly. The staff-sergeant attached to the syndicate immediately wanted to know who it was. (Cursing was a sign of 'cracking'.) I didn't say, and nobody split on me, and it was dark, so they never found out.

Supper at Penn Rock was unidentified tins again, this time three men to two tins. Fish and bully beef, this time. We went to sleep without washing at all. I took only my boots off. In the meantime the evaluators took it as an evening out, sleeping on beds in tents with gas lights, having a braai, drinking beer.

Reveille the next morning was at 0430 and at 0550 we departed, going back across the mountain to the dam again. Here we breakfasted on bread and coffee.

Here I suffered an embarrassment; small, but it stuck in my memory. We got the coffee dished out into our 'firebuckets'. This was the metal mug that went around the kidney-shaped-cross-section waterbottle. The pouch in which it came was a little too small, and it stuck every time I wanted to take it out.

This morning, there was too little time to wiggle it out, so I took the coffee directly into the firebucket, without taking it out of the pouch. With the coffee in the firebucket, I tried again to get it out, spilt some coffee, wetting the pouch, shrinking it. In the end I drank from the pouch. I don't know if anybody saw me, but I felt very small and stupid with sticky hands and chin.

The next task the syndicate was set was a theoretical exercise, to develop, within a set time limit, a plan to destroy a weapons factory given certain resources. A selector sat by to evaluate each member's participation.

The last test I took part in was a run back to base, individually, carrying a waterbottle and rifle. By this time I was so tired that I did not even try running. When I walked past a Samil parked on the road, the staff-sergeant on it called out my number, and told me to get on. I was pulled off the selection. `RTU', the bats would say.

The only consolation was that there was left-over food from the selectors' breakfast on the truck, which the others shared with me. I missed the obstacle course bit.

The rest of the day we, the failures, were employed in cleaning and packing away the equipment used on the selection. I found my grootsak again, but this time my webbing was gone. I never saw it again, or the electric shaver my father had lent me. When I told Cpl. Swart he just said; "Don't make your problem my problem." C Musso, the chap's whose webbing I ended up with, came with his platoon commander into our bungalow, and exchanged the webbing he had with his own.

The selection had also made me miss the night-shooting exercise, and the first chance we had to exchange faulty equipment and wrong-sized clothing.

The hardest part of Basics, for me, started now. Since so many men had gone for section-leaders there were now empty places in the main hall of the bungalow, so I also lost the cubicle, and what little privacy it offered. Most of the friends I had managed to make were gone, Shane Burger, Van Zuydam, Smit.

By the time I came back to Platoon 2, they were almost ready for the company commander's inspection, which took place on the next Saturday. My stuff had been packed away for the duration of the selection, so I had to unpack it all and get it ready for inspection.

Inspection is here used as a noun.

The inspection is the one thing you, as individual, platoon or as company, can never get quite right.

The basis of the inspection is the bed.

There is a ritual to making a bed for inspection. First the mat of the bed (made of steel strips or expanded metal) is bent flat by using a broomstick or by turning the bed on its side and kicking it from the underside. On the flat mat, the mattress is put in its cover. Using an electric iron and a clothes brush or dixie, the cover is ironed smooth with sharp edges. Next the bottom sheet, is laid down tucked it in with hospital corners, and ironed. The top sheet is then laid on the bed with the seam at the head edge of the mattress. The blanket is laid on the top sheet, the two parallel lines straight, in the centre of the bed. The seam of the blanket is two towel-widths away from the foot edge of the mattress. The exposed part of the top sheet is now folded down over the blanket, and the unit of top sheet and blanket is tucked in. The coverings are

now pulled tight from underneath the bed. All the edges are ironed square. The pillow, in an ironed pillowcase, is laid on the exposed bottom sheet.

I never put floor polish or shaving cream on my blanket to make its corners square.

On the foot end of the bed one of your towels was laid on which your Bible, eating utensils, and razor were exhibited. Between the towel and the pillow, your skeleton webbing was laid out. On the pillow stood your bush hat and beret.

Your trommel stood open at the foot of the bed. Some cardboard or hardboard, covered with your balsak, filled the mouth of the trommel. On the right half of it was laid the working parts of your rifle, in order of length: piston group, return spring, gas tube, body cover and breechblock. On the left half was your single magazine and cleaning kit. Your rifle body leaned against the centre of the trommel lid, its butt on from the edge.

Above the bed was a small shelf. On the shelf stood your other pair of boots, your PT shoes and your sandals. Below the shelf were two hooks, on which your grootsak hung by its shoulder straps. Your rolled-up blanket was strapped on to the top, and your rolled-up sleeping bag to the bottom. Your *staaldak* was strapped to the front of the *grootsak* by threading its chin strap under the flap straps of the *grootsak*.

Your cupboard was filled with your clothes. On hangers hung your duffle coat, browns, and extra overall, its legs draped over its shoulder. On the top two shelves were your underclothes and PT clothes, made up into packets. In practice, to make it square, pieces of cardboard were covered with the particular piece of clothing, or a piece of the particular piece of clothing. On the bottom shelf of the cupboard stood your squared patrol bag. During inspection, your doibie stood on the front left hand corner of the cupboard.

Your inspection had two private places: the area behind your patrol bag, and your trommel under the balsak.

I got almost no sleep the night before the company commander's inspection.

A week later we had OC's inspection. This was a much greater affair. For this we got a television set, and a table and benches. Everything had to be painted. The standard of the inspection was much higher.

Here I suffered a delusion that I had only experienced once since then. It is the feeling that the world is the wrong way round. Our bungalows each had two doors, one to the north, and one opposite, across the width of the bungalow, to the south. These doors were to the eastern end of the bungalow. Normally we used only the south door, to save time when locking and unlocking. During preparation for the inspection this door was locked, and we used only the north door, to polish the more heavily used floor on the south side. Only on the morning of the inspection was the normal uses of the doors resumed. Due to lack of sleep I became very disoriented, and to this day, when I picture this inspection, I see Cdmt Boshoff coming in through a door on the north side, but at the west end of the bungalow. For this reason I will not trust any memory completely.

The Monday morning after the OC's inspection we were meant to go to the shooting range, but it rained. Late the afternoon it cleared, and we marched to there, did some revision, ate and went to bed. (Bed being a

sleeping bag under a bivvie.) It rained during the night, and we got wet, but we had 11 hours sleep. The next morning they decided that it was going to rain again, or that the range was too wet, and we marched back again, taking a shortcut. Two days of mud.

The rest comes from memory, for I have not written any letters after this.

We had the following two weekends at the sea. The first was with the company for VTB (*vryetydsbesteding* [Leisure time utilisation]). We went down to the sea in Samils, and camped in an enclosure, using military equipment. Saturday evening we could each buy a hot-dog or two, and a maximum of two beers. I sold my two beers: The first for a hotdog, the second for R5.00. The bonus of this camp was that all my friends that had left for section-leaders also attended.

The next weekend we went with the chaplain on a Bible-study camp. This was the first time that we could meet people from the other companies, as this was not a Company-sponsored event. This time we slept in bungalows, and ate non-military food, prepared by women volunteers. We slept a lot. I remember sleeping on the beach, and tanning the outline of my hand on my stomach.

Sports parades on Wednesdays were always a drag for me. We had to dress in shorts and T-shirt and, as I was never on any team, 'support' one of my company's teams. The only event I could support with any enthusiasm was tug-of-war, probably because it was usually the last event of the day.

It is very interesting to see the differences between platoons.

Platoon 1 had a terror of a Platoon Sergeant. After section leader's selection it was almost drained, and the other platoons had to transfer people to ensure that the platoons stayed of equal size. On occasion he would chase his platoon until someone collapsed and someone in command made him stop.

We in Platoon 2 had the most professional leaders.

Platoon 3 had Lt. Visser and Cpl. Marais. The platoon was always singing, on the Corporal's instigation. I still remember how I cursed him when he made us leopard-crawl on a rainy Sunday, with us wearing our only set of browns. Lt. Visser made me run about 3 kilometres once, for joking with him after I let my rifle fall. The problem with this is that he was funny with me first, so why couldn't I also be?

Platoon 4 was probably the most mediocre, under Cpl. McColm.

Platoon 5 had a Cpl. Smith, so relaxed that he was sent to the Border, and replaced by someone more enthusiastic, a PF or short service corporal. I remember doing rifle drills in a bungalow with Cpl. Smith in command. He would order a certain weapon state, and then check. If your rifle was in the wrong state he would 'punish' you with 5 push-ups.

I can't remember anything about the other platoon commanders.

Passing out was a great affair. There was a whole week of preparation.

The whole affair lasted two days. On the first day, there was an inter-company competition of 'battle athletics', featuring events such as hand grenade throwing, buddy carry, and a full-kit marathon. For the evening there was a boxing tournament. All parents were invited to these events. The passing-out parade was on the morning of the second day. As usual I was not selected to take part in the parade, and had to help with smartening up the place, under Cpl. McColm.

My parents drove down from the Transvaal to come and see the parade and fetch me. They also brought Ludek's girlfriend with them. They came during the evening of the boxing tournament. Here I had two amazing strokes of luck. The whole intake was in the main transport hangar, which housed the event, a thousand or more young men in brown overalls and green doibies. There was no way that my parents could find me. I was sitting in the last row of seats, as there was no more place on the stands. An MP came and asked us to vacate the seats, as there were visitors standing at the back. I got up, and saw that these visitors were my parents! They had just arrived. Ludek's girlfriend was with them. I went to look for Ludek in C-Coy's stand, and found him right in front of me as I came round the back of the stand.

The parade went without a hitch, and we left soon after that.

I remember, during the ten day pass that followed, that I found the cutlery very long and slender.

Storeman's Course

After the ten days' leave was up, on the 26th of October, I flew from Jan Smuts to Port Elizabeth by SAA. In those days National Servicemen were offered 40% discount on SAA and SAR tickets, which made it affordable. The army made the travel arrangements before we went on leave.

It was a morning flight, and only late the afternoon did the Samils arrive to take us back to Grahamstown. Fortunately my luggage was packed with biscuits and stuff, so I did not go hungry.

That evening in the bungalow we were back together as a platoon. A few guys were late from leave, (technically AWOL), of whom one was later declared a deserter.

We were told by Lt Muller that the next day would be selection day, and that we had a choice of becoming a Mortarist, an Assault Pioneer, a Rifleman or a Driver. I tried to believe otherwise, because the OC had told us that we would all have a chance to become some other kind of specialist, and I could not face another three months of rifleman training. The prospects looked bleak. Matric maths was a recommendation for becoming a mortarist, and a civilian driver's license a requirement for becoming a driver.

On selection day we had a selection parade. It is similar to a sport- or church parade: The companies fall in on the parade ground, and when participants for each sport or church is called, they fall in on the designated spot. When everybody interested has fallen out, the next sport or church is called. The only difference with the selection parade was that 2IC read out descriptions of each post, and that you fell in a queue at the selectors' table. My memory fails me in exactly what happened there, but I somehow found myself last in the queue at the QM's table, and was applying to become a storeman. Corporal Swart was around, and he called me to the front, and made sure I was chosen as a storeman for C-Coy. Some prayers are answered.

The truth behind the story of being only allowed in the fighting musterings came out on this parade: The Chief of the Defence Force had decreed that people who had been transferred to 6 SAI from the Air Force would not be allowed to become infrastructure personnel. I think this was to avoid hard feelings in the Air Force, who did not want to be robbed of good people who then went to do trivial tasks, when they had been told they were

needed in the more active parts of the Defence Force. This rule was bent a little: Douglas-Henry, who had the bed next to mine during Basics, turned out to be a graphic artist, and was snaffled for the unit's media division.

We could become storemen, cooks, drivers or clerks, but only to fighting companies. A buddy from Platoon 2 was ahead of me in the queue, and I feel sorry for him that he was not selected, all the positions having been filled when he got there.

However it may be, I was selected to be trained as a storeman, and I had to stand a good deal of ridicule because of it: storeman is one of the less honoured musterings. B-Company was the courses company for the non-fighting musterings, A-Company, (the largest,) the rifle training company, and C-Company, the support (mortar and assault pioneer) training company. D-Company was a company of SACC that was deployed in urban COIN-ops in Grahamstown.

The life in the new company (B) was not much different. We (the students of the General Storeman's course) lived in two small bungalows, similar to the ones we had in the Air Force. We shared an ablution block with the Pay Clerk's course. They lived in one bungalow, and used the remaining one of the set of four as a lecture room. Our lecture room was a bungalow about 50 metres from our bungalow.

Other courses in the company were Drivers, Admin Clerks, Signallers and Chefs.

The course was well structured. At the start of the course we each got a timetable of what would be happening. The course was mostly about stores organisation and requisites. Practical work was mostly the filling-in of forms, although we did get training in maintenance and storage of night-vision equipment, and visited the magazine. On some Saturdays we did some labour in the QM-stores.

Military training did not stop. Every morning there were two or three periods of drill before lectures started. The last period of the day was devoted to PT. Once the Company's fitness test showed a problem in the 2.4, so that for a time a run around the base after breakfast was included. Occasionally there was 15 minutes or so of rifle PT before drill. This military training was conducted by our platoon commander and platoon sergeant, Corporal Whyte. I don't know what they did during the rest of the day.

Cpl Whyte was going to join the Navy after clearing out, and was already declared fit for submarine service.

Our lecturers were all very experienced NCOs of the Ordnance Service Corps, and most of them were Coloured. The lecturer that impressed me the most was a (white) Sgt Reynolds, an ex-infantryman, who had been wounded by a tripwire landmine. His one leg was shorter than the other, so that he had to wear a built-up boot, but he was one of the fittest soldiers I ever knew.

The experience of our lecturers gave us insight into some very interesting trivia:

All animals in the Defence Force have to be accounted for, except cats: they breed too fast.

Since it is illegal to use phosphorus weapons against personnel, it is stored under pyrotechnics. The store in which it is kept can be identified by the container of water outside the door.

Despite a policy of bilingualism, all stores paperwork is done in English.

The people on the course were much different from those in C-Company. In Platoon 2 I was one of the youngest. On the course there were quite a few younger than I. There was no minimum academic qualification for being on the course; in Charlie the lowest qualification had been Std 9. On the other hand, Hugo Vaughn, two beds from mine was a qualified mechanical engineer, who had worked at Koeberg nuclear power station. It was here for the first time that I met people from the area; most were previous members of Bravo company, and had been called up to the unit nearest home, which was usually Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage or Despatch.

Weekends were a bit of a trial to me. The last inspection was on Saturday. For the rest of the weekend, everything that was thrown away was thrown on the floor, so that by Sunday evening there would be piles of trash on the floor, 'because we are going to sweep it later anyway.' These people apparently did not understand that clean living is for nobody's benefit but your own, and the ones who did were outnumbered.

I once saw an MP search someone's belongings. Apparently some money had disappeared one day during sports, and Koorts, who had the bed next to mine, was suspected. It is difficult to describe the slow, patient, methodical and thorough way in which the MP did the search. He went to the length of unrolling socks, and feeling inside them. And he left everything the way he found it.

He didn't find the money, but that does not mean Koorts is not a thief. I know that he stole from the QM stores when we worked there for practical experience.

At one point, shortly after the lectures on ammunition, our platoon leaders searched the roofs of our bungalows, and found there a plastic bag with some tear-gas grenades in it. We were given a pole-PT session when no-one would admit to putting it there, but it did not yield more information. Relations with the leaders were a bit strained for a time, especially because half of the platoon, who lived in the other (my) bungalow, could not possibly have known anything about it. I believe that the grenades were possibly left there by previous inhabitants, who had forgotten about it.

Another anecdote about a roof. On the section leader's course, during our basics, some of the students hid in the bungalow's roof to avoid lectures and get extra sleep. They were caught, and later, with the whole course fallen in, were called out. They were sent to fetch all their belongings. Most of the other students expected to see a nasty bit of physical exercise, but when the offenders came back they were simply sent back to the companies they came from. End of lesson.

During this phase I wrote my matric examinations. I wrote a *verklaring* soon after the start of the course, asking for leave to write exams. This got lost, so after rewriting it, I was called to orders before the Captain, 0500 on 6/11/1987. I woke up very late, about 0430, shaved, ironed my overalls's sleeves, and accusing my buddies of neglecting to wake me, left my bed unmade. I stood waiting for more than an hour before I was called.

Being on orders is a frightening experience, and I am glad that I never had to do it for receiving punishment. You stand at ease outside the commander's office. On the command from the CSM (Staff de Wet) you come

to attention. 'Mark time!', 'Forward March!' into the office and 'Mark Time!' in front of the desk. 'Orders ... Halt!'. When the business is finished, 'Orders, About Turn!', 'Mark Time!, and 'Forward March' out of the office.

The company commander, at the time Captain Roux, read my *verklaring*, and asked me which subject was the hardest. I fumbled for an answer, at which my platoon commander came to my rescue and said Natural Science. In the end he gave me leave for the three days of the examinations, the morning of the day before my first paper, and the whole day before the Natural Science paper. I was very grateful for this, but only later found out that I was entitled to a full day off the day before every paper.

For two of the papers Corporal Ter Haar, platoon sergeant of the Pay Clerks, took me into town. For the other one I went to the main gate, and had the MP's ask people leaving the base to give me a lift into town.

To come back after writing the second paper, I was told to go to the railway station and telephone the duty office, who would send the duty driver to pick me up. I found the station, but the number I had been told to call did not exist. (It was the internal number.) In the end I tried to walk back to base, but got hopelessly lost. Fortunately some officer saw me walking where I shouldn't, and asked me where I was going. I told him my story, and he gave me the correct number. The next time I was much more careful to watch in which direction we went.

The examinations made me miss an opportunity to go to De Aar (97 Ammunition Depot) to fetch ammunition for the unit. The four students with the best score in our first major progress test could go, but when the call went out I was busy writing a paper. Booyens and Louw (who later got the shield for 'Best Student') went, and, when they came back, made us jealous by telling us of the living conditions of the National Servicemen who did duty there.

During this phase we (Booyens and I) discovered the base library. The hours were awkward, but we joined and could take out books that we could read in moments off. I remember that I read a Tintin comic there. I think I managed to read two or three other books that I lent (*sic*) from this library.

The chaplain started a choir, which I joined. All the members were of B-Coy. It was not very professional. Our leader, Heunis, had sung in Nabucco once, but I don't think he had any formal music teaching training. Singing in the choir had one advantage: it gave me a chance of escaping from sport. Towards the end of the phase we had our only official performance, in the Christmas service. This earned us a Saturday afternoon and evening pass.

Grahamstown on a Saturday evening is very quiet for a young man from the platteland. I had a (microwave) pizza at a small place in a mall, went to see a children's movie, and called my parents on the telephone. I did not have to queue, and it was quiet.

Each company had a telephone night. This meant that each company could use the public telephones behind the duty office, after hours, on only one night of the week. Sunday nights were open. The queues were always long and it was always a noisy place, but there were some phones for incoming calls only. I usually called my parents only to ask them to call me back. In this way you didn't have to face the wrath of the queue for calling too long, but it was always a long wait for the phones to clear so that your call could come through. Not very convenient for the people at home.

At the end of this course we were still four weeks away from the end of the phase. We now started our crash course in weapons training. (A crash course means breakfasting at 0500, and having lectures after hours.) The course started off with a new issue of equipment. We got a second issue of browns, the new brown pattern of webbing, and additional magazines and water bottles. I believe we were the last intake ever to do basic training with the old green canvas webbing.

It was a condensed version of the rifleman's course. The greater part of the day was devoted to weapons drill, and the rest to lectures on patrols, vehicle movement, helicopter drills, etc. We were given a demonstration of a section attack, and during our day on the rifle range demos of hand grenades, grenade launchers, rifle grenades, smoke grenades and -generators, and could fire a burst with the MAG. We were taken to the rifle range by Samil, but marched back the next day. For the day's shooting I got the best score of the course!

On the rifle range we were introduced to our new platoon leaders. Our old Junior Leaders were clearing out in time for Christmas, and were replaced by new ones fresh from Infantry School. We were much amused when somebody reported that he had seen a new Lieutenant cleaning his new pips with a piece of tissue paper. Ours were Corporal Bessinger and Lt du Toit.

When we had come back from the rifle range, I went to the shower or somewhere and left my kas wide open, and when I got back my rifle was gone. Fortunately I had followed orders, and the working parts were locked in my trommel. This was a disaster. It was one of the worst thing that could happen. (During basics the MPs would come into the bungalows at night and steal rifles, sometimes by extracting keys from the pockets of clothes lying around. The victims were severly punished, but it taught us to lock things up and guard the keys.) That night while the others were cleaning their rifles I had to tell Corporal Bessinger. He was not excited, but made me sweat a little by pretending that he did not know where my rifle was. In the end he let me have it back, and told me not to do it again. I was very grateful for his leniency.

When we went on pass, it was very close to Christmas, and all public transport was fully booked. In the end they organised us a bus to take us back: a very luxurious air conditioned bus from Springbok Atlas Safaris. This turned out to be quite lucky for us who had decide to go on leave bus: we were doing the 25km full kit (extra overall, sleeping bag, six magazines, four litres of water, extra pair of boots) route march as part of our final fitness test, when the bus company's officials came to sell us the tickets. All who were going on leave by bus were picked up along the route, and driven to base by Samil. A simple, early end to a rather strenuous exercise.

We went on leave on the 18th of December for ten days.

I got back from leave on midnight of the Monday 28th of December 1987. On the Tuesday morning the platoons were reorganised. This was necessary because the courses platoons had been of unequal sizes. Drivers and signallers were transferred to A & C companies, and there was some transfers to the HQ company. (Hugo Vaughn, who had been applying to become a conscientious objector, was one of them. This shows that the army is not as insensitive as it is usually portrayed, on condition that you approach them in

the right way.) The platoons were not arbitrarily grouped, but we were allowed to group ourselves so that friends could be together. I ended up in Platoon 2, which contained most of the pay-clerks. The platoon sergeant was Corporal Ter Haar, who had joined Short Service, and was very good at his job

By Tuesday afternoon our training in urban counter-insurgency started. It was again a crash course. Three weeks training was condensed into two. Lectures started at 0600, and lights out was at 2300. On Saturdays training went on until 1600.

Training comprised riot control, patrols, traffic control points, cordons, and lectures on legal aspects. Despite the nonsense spoken today about the violence of the security forces, there was a continuous, almost religious, hammering in of the concept of minimum violence.

Somewhere during training I was transferred to Platoon 4. Platoon 2 had gained a signaller, and I was transferred because Corporal Ter Haar did not want me, because I had needed too much persuasion to jump off a Buffel the first time. (The fact that on subsequent jumps I did not hesitate did not seem to matter.) Platoon 4's platoon sergeant was Corporal Bessinger, and the platoon commander Lt du Toit. Bessinger had black hair, and loved having fun, even if it was at the expense of others. Du Toit was upright in carriage and character, spoke slightly through his nose, and tried to do a good job. Platoon 4 was known as the G4 platoon; of the whole platoon only ten or so were classed G1K1 (the top medical classification.)

A new feature during this training was section leaders. They had completed their training during the previous phase, and were promoted on the final parade before we went on leave. I was in section 2, I think, under L/Corporal Louw. These section leaders were much too enthusiastic to our liking, and the most amusing thing I heard about them is that somebody said he would rather "stretch" [*`strek'* - brace] to his bed, because it had more lines than the section leader. (The grey army blankets had two blue lines down the middle.) We had to treat the Lance corporals with the same respect as the full corporals, our platoon sergeants, and that made the possibility of much trouble, as there were four of them to a platoon. Fortunately they were quite insecure and mostly kept together and to themselves.

Our section leaders were L/Corporals Moore (section 1), Louw (section 2), and Du Toit. Moore was blonde and blue eyed, Du Toit smaller and with a weak chin. Louw was the tallest and had dark brown hair on a smallish head.

(During COIN Urban training we had four section leaders per platoon. A, B, and C-Coys did this phase of training simultaneously. C-Coy, being a support company, had a higher proportion of section leaders than the rifle companies. To give them proper experience in the operation of a platoon in an urban COIN environment the surplus were farmed out to the rifle companies for the duration of training. They left us after training.)

On Wednesday the 6th of January we were evaluated. The evaluation took the form of a night operation in a black township. The base was used as a model township. Each platoon was given a different task, and had evaluators attached. Our job was to patrol the 'married quarters', which was like a little suburb of blocks of flats and houses next to the base. I wrote home that we had learned more from evaluation than from training, and in view of my later

experiences the exercise was quite realistic. The bungalows simulated houses to be searched, and many illegal items, e.g. cameras, were found.

After training we cleaned the company lines, so that it could be ready on our return.

A-Company was to deploy in Wits Command, and we in the Northern Transvaal Command. C-Coy was to continue training in conventional warfare.

On Monday the 11 of January we deployed. We were driven with Elwierda's buses from Grahamstown to Voortrekkerhoogte, Pretoria, where we stopped and the officers hunted for someone to tell us where to go. We got a guide or directions of some sort and went somewhere north of Pretoria. We got there in the middle of the night, and there was no accommodation for us. Neither had we any kit, for we had left the Samil that carried our *'grootsakke'* far behind. (The only luggage we were allowed was a *'grootsak*' and a neat 'civvy bag' each.) I had a towel in my civvy bag, and with that as bedding went to sleep in the grass.

The next day we found that our arrival was unexpected. We had arrived at Rietgat, a platoon base near Soshanguve, where we were to work, but there had been no preparations made for our moving in. There was no proper accommodation for us, and no food. Our leader element spent the most of the day away to sort these things out and left us to spend the day in the sun. We had our first meal since the previous day's food pack only at 1600. It was a kind of chicken-offcut stew with pap, both burnt, as it had been prepared on a fire. Morale, that evening, was very low.

We slept in the available tents that night, at about one platoon to a tent (16 x 32). We ate our first ratpacks that night, our section leaders with their greater store of experience showing us how to prepare it.

We lost Goncalves that night. He was a small Portugese signaller, and a signal had been sent from Grahamstown for him to return, as Portugese-speaking signallers were needed elsewhere. He left that night, and I heard later that he spent the rest of his National Service at Rundu with some specialist (EW) signals unit.

The core of the base was a south-facing farmhouse surrounded by a wire fence. The ops and signals rooms were inside the house. Behind (to the north of) the house was the stores, and in a lean-to behind that, the showers. The showers had hot water, heated by a wood fire outside the entrance. To the east of the house was the kitchen, with the mess and TV room north of that, and east of the stores. To the west of the house was the transport park, the swimming dam, and the mobile shower (reserved for the officers and senior NCO's.)

The rest of that week we spent in preparing the base for operations. We pitched (brand new) tents for four platoons, outside the fence, to the Northeast. A number of portable toilets (called "kickstart rockets" because of the mechanism of flushing and the shape of the unit) were delivered, and set up to the east of the fence. We cleaned the place of all vegetation. Only on the 14th of January were things so organised that we could start eating wet rations.

We of Platoon 4 got the tents inside the fence, to the south of the house, as living quarters. This placed us rather close to the leader element, but also close to all the amenities.

Capt Roux, our trusted company commander, was sent to the border, and he was replaced by a big Major, whose name I cannot remember. The replacement of Capt Roux meant that we started patrols immediately, instead of waiting for the beginning of the next week. This Major also scared the wits out of us by asking, one evening before supper, where our rifles were. About half the company had theirs with them, and the others not. Ours was locked with a chain to our tent pole. A punishment session was organised for the next morning, but the platoon commanders squashed it by telling him that it was left there with their consent. For the rest of that trip we lived with our rifles always at our sides.

We were very much still a company under training, albeit operational training. Before we left on patrol, we each received 10 rounds of ammunition, which we had to hand back when we came back from patrol.

On the eastern part of the base, outside the fence, were a couple of tents that belonged to camper sappers. Their only duty, it appeared, was every morning to sweep the untarred road leading to the base for mines. Contact with them was discouraged, as their discipline was not up to standard. They managed to overturn a Buffel on the end of that road, probably out of sheer boredom.

We started work on the 15th of January. We lost our section leader on the first day. We were issued A55 radios with whip aerials for all platoon communications. These tapering whip aerials consists of a number of tubes, the head of the first fitting into a socket at the tail of the second, and so on for about six sections, held together by a spring-loaded cord down the bore of the tubes. This arrangement makes it easy to break down the aerial and store it in a small space. Due to inexperience, L/Corporal Louw carried the radio on his back, instead of letting it stand by itself on floor of the Buffel. Late in the morning, we looked for a secluded place and stopped for a break. While we stopped, Louw wanted to fix the top section of the aerial, which had come out and dangled at the end of the rest of the aerial. He, of course, was using the front left seat of the Buffel, behind the driver. He took hold of the aerial and bent it over to Ian Card, who used the right rear seat, to put the end section back. The moment Card let the aerial go it swept up and touched the high-tension wire under which we had parked. I had watched the aerial sweep up and saw the blue sparks where the wire and the top section of the aerial touched. Rheeder, the driver, hit the aerial away from the wire, and he and Lindsey took the radio off Louw's back, after catching him before he almost fell backwards off the Buffel. They made him sit down in his own seat, but he was almost unconscious, although he was able to sit upright, and groaned intermittently.

Lindsey, a signaler, called Corporal Bessinger on that same radio, who heard that someone had been shot, instead of shocked. Without leadership, and being on our first day’s patrol, we were somewhat lost, but we managed to find our way to the Technicon Northern Transvaal's main gate, where Corporal Bessinger met us. I cannot quite remember how we got Louw off the Buffel or to hospital, but I imagine that the medics, that I faintly remember we had in base, took him in their ambulance. I understand that had rather deep burns to his buttocks, where he had stood with his back to the side of the Buffel. We didn't see him again for a month or two.

After this incident we religiously pulled down the aerials when we had to pass underneath any kind of power line, even though it was rarely necessary.

During the month or so we spent at Rietgat we had three company Commanders, and each had his own idea of how things should be run. I therefore cannot give a clear description of our routine. Our main task was patrolling the township of Soshanguve, preventing intimidation, arson, rioting, and crime. We had a company of five platoons, (with a sixth patrolling the township at Grahamstown), much more than usual in a rifle company, so that we could do all the work and not work too hard. In general, we had a platoon on patrol, one on OP duty, a platoon on base duty, and a platoon in rest. (I know this does not add up, but I cannot really remember.)

The platoon on base duty had to clean and maintain the base, do kitchen duty, and supply loaders for the Samil that went to fetch the rations.

The platoon on OP duty supplied guards. There was one guard at the gate, and two, later three OP posts to be manned. The first two OP posts were the two immense water towers in the township. (Somebody, Rohr, I think, managed to drop his rifle from the OP, bending the barrel. It was officially explained by the universal explanation for anything broken, 'it was dropped from a Buffel'.) The third OP was a larger-than-usual tree to the north of the base. It was not a very good OP, because from it you could only see more bushveld trees. It was intended as a contribution to base protection. The guard platoon later also did a security patrol around the base just before sundown. I think that the guard platoon commander had to help man the JOC (Joint Operations Centre) at the Soshanguve police station.

The platoon in rest usually had a night patrol the night before, and were therefore sleeping.

There was little to do by way of entertainment. There was the swimming dam, and the video. We had a spider that lived behind our tent, whose web stretched from one of the guy ropes of the tent to the fence. We used to feed him by throwing moths and small insects (abundant in that bushveld area and climate,) into the web. It is quite an experience to see the speed with which the spider can wrap the insect. The last meal we gave him was a large praying mantis. This insect attacked the spider, even though it was partly entrapped, and bit off two of the spider's legs. The web was deserted soon after that, and we assume that the spider died. The mantis could not free itself, and also died.

Romans (sunspiders) were also common. These are huge, hairy, red ground running spiders with an enormous pair of jaws, and a matching aggression. Somebody put one in a red firebucket with an *'oorkruiper*' (earwig), and made them fight. The earwig is, despite the enormous pair of pinchers it carries at the end of its tail, not an aggressive insect, and the roman soon had it cut to pieces.

We had some Visitors' Days, the first being on Sunday the 23rd of January. I wrote to my parents to come, and to bring my UNISA registration papers. (I had passed my matriculation examinations with enough success to be admitted to studying in the sciences.) Before the day came there was a change in schedule, and we were to patrol on that day. Lt Du Toit, very accommodating, let the few of us who had visitors coming stay in base that day. My parents came, and brought my papers. My youngest brother was much impressed by my rifle, and had a ride on the sappers' Buffel.

A few days later my father went to register me, and brought the books to the base. We were on patrol that day, so that I did not see him, but I was called to HQ that night, where S/Sgt De Wet gave me the briefcase that formed part of my luggage for the rest of my National Service. I had another visit from them, but that was not during visiting hours, so that all we had was a chat at the gate. It was very nice of them to do that, especially since they could not know whether I would be in base or not.

After one or two more visitors' days there were no more, because three people had gone AWOL (and one had become drunk) with the assistance of their visitors.

At some point Platoon 1 was detached to do some guard duty somewhere. It appeared that they had to guard some resort where a number of high politicians were holding a summit.

Our main task, patrols, was mostly uneventful. We would leave base in early in the morning, and drive around the township, looking for anything untoward. At around 1000 we would return to base for brunch, and then go back to patrolling until about 1700. The night patrols left soon after supper, and returned after dawn.

We evolved a system of single vehicle patrols. Instead of operating in three sections and a platoon HQ, we operated per vehicle. The platoon commander collected his own section, so that we had four independent vehicles patrolling. They were commanded by the platoon commander, the platoon sergeant, and the two remaining section leaders, respectively.

I soon migrated to driving in the Lieutenant's Buffel and in the morning he would visit all the schools to collect the attendance figures. In practice, our main occupation was ordinary community policing. We would patrol the area, and then someone would stop the patrol and say, "Somebody broke the window of my house". After a brief look at the damage we would then oblige the complainant with a lift to the police station.

We were regarded as policemen by the community. We sometimes surprised groups of gamblers, who would scatter at the approach of the Buffel. At other times men would try to show out shebeens to us, as if we had the power to do something about it. (Even then, during the state of emergency, the Army had no such powers.)

I cannot remember that we ever manned a road block.

We were once called to supply a cordon, I think in support of a police search. We were just in bed when we heard Lt Du Toit call the platoon to fall in. We were ready for action in about 5 minutes, and we piled on the company Samil, as all the Buffels were on patrol. We were dropped off and formed the cordon. After standing in the cordon for a while we got on the Samil and were driven back to base, where we went back to bed. We never heard about the results of the search.

Once, on night patrol, we heard some shooting not far away from where we were patrolling. We drove to the area, and found that policeman had shot at a suspect, but that he had escaped. There was something of a blood spoor, but not something we inexperienced few could follow, and soon the police left. Lt du Toit was not satisfied, and he limited the patrol to that area. He soon stopped the Buffel in front of a house, hopped off with no explanation, leaving his bodyguard on the Buffel, and went inside. The suspect was inside

the house, wounded in the hip. The Lieutenant had seen a woman wringing out a cloth outside the house, and immediately realised that nobody does washing at 0100, and that something suspicious was going on inside the house. Just ordinary good police work.

Once we had just visited a secondary school, when we noticed a group of ten or so children behind the school. We dropped the section on one side of the school, and then the driver and I (as vehicle guard) went around to the other side of the school. The two units, the section on foot and the vehicle simultaneously 'attacked' the group from opposite sides. They scattered, running into the veld, and the section on foot gave chase. A few were caught, but Jannie Ras couldn't catch up with the one he was chasing. (Which is a credit to the child, as Ras was a great sportsman.) Ras then brought his rifle up and shouted a warning. The pursued stopped dead in his tracks with his hands in the air. I cannot remember what we did with the children, but I think that one of the ones we caught were not in school uniform, and that we took them to the police station.

Another incident that concerns Ras: Late one afternoon we crossed the busy feeder road to the township, where a bakkie had just collided with a PUTCO bus. The Lieutenant went to look at what had happened. Ras, who sat next to the Lieutenant and therefore answered the radio when he was not on the Buffel, called the JOC to report the accident, claiming two dead and some injured. When the Lieutenant returned, he said that nobody was even hurt! Ras would always do such rash things, but fortunately nothing serious ever happened because of it. Ras had had the bed next to mine on the storeman's course, so that I knew him fairly well by that time.

Due to a lack of time, not all people trained as drivers could get their all their licences during the previous phase. One of the drivers allotted to our platoon, Wepener, was one of them. Fortunately we had drivers in our platoon that was being deployed as riflemen, who could take his place. A SM came up from Grahamstown to do the final training and to issue the licences. Wepener got his Buffel license, but on returning from patrol on his first day as driver he misjudged the turning circle at the gate, and hit the right gatepost with the fender. No damage to the Buffel (of course), but the post was dislodged. The CSM, S/Sgt De Wet, immediately revoked his licence, and Wepener spent the rest of the trip as a rifleman.

Because of a crackdown on the violence in Pietermaritzburg, we were suddenly placed on 10 minute standby to go there. Platoon 1 was away in Voortrekkerhoogte doing some guarding, and Platoon 5 was to stay behind and carry on with the work, so that only Platoons 2, 3, and 4 were to go. All patrols were called back, and we spent the day or two we had to wait in refresher training. I wrote a short letter home to say that we would be moving, which was dated 4 February. We had a fair number of Natalians in the company, which made the idea of the move popular, and some others were very eager to see more action, but I was very reluctant to go. After a day or two of waiting we were sent back to normal work, but on 30 minute standby for departure to Pietermaritzburg. On the 8th I wrote another short letter to explain that we had not moved, and might not.

Operation *Adding*

On a rainy Wednesday, the 10th of February, we of Pl. 4 were on OP duty. At about 1000 a rumour went around that the Lt Du Toit had recalled the OPs. This caused some excitement, as it was thought that we were at last going to Pietermaritzburg. Because I had heard on the radio news that morning that there had been a coup in Bophuthatswana, I tried to tell the people that we were not going to Pietermaritzburg, as Soshanguve was on the Bophuthatswana border. At about 1100 the platoon was called to orders. We were told that we were going to go on standby in Zeerust, to assist in any action the SADF might be involved in. We were not allowed to take any civilian kit with us; we were allowed only a grootsak each. At 1130 we were ready to leave. After the hurry up there was some waiting for the vehicles to come; we left in 5 Samil 50s, with the baggage on a Samag 120.

It rained all the way. The canvas cover of a Samil is reasonably watertight, but nevertheless there was a constant spray or dripping of water inside. The benches became very hard, and the noise was constant. A tiring journey.

We stopped at Swartruggens to buy some food. There were public telephones on the street corner, and I quickly phoned home to say where we were going. At the same time I looked in the map in the telephone directory to find out exactly where Zeerust and Swartruggens are.

At 1900 we were at the military base in Zeerust, the home of 2 Special Service Battalion (2SSB), an Armour unit. We were given coffee (in styrofoam cups), and afterwards we retrieved enough magazines from the baggage on the Samag so that the we had one each, and were each given 30 rounds to fill it with. After a long wait we were told that the President had been freed by the Special Forces. There was some helicopter activity, and we were told that a General Turner had been shot in the foot, and was being casevaced. We were to sleep in the VTB hall on the base.

[What had really happened was this: A part of the Bophuthatswana Army was security troops, used exclusively in guarding sensitive places. They were a kind of 'second class' soldier, and were paid less. The leader of the coup, Rocky Malebane-Metsing, used this difference to get them to support him in taking over the government of Bophuthatswana. The President, Lucas Mangope, and his senior ministers and the leadership of the army were held hostage in the Independence Stadium. The members of the cabinet that remained free asked the South African government to intervene. The doors to the stadium were forced open with a Ratel, and the hostages freed. Jannie Geldenhuys, Chief of the Defence Force, went up to one of the rebels, disarmed him, and said "Take me to your leader."]

As we unpacked the *grootsakke* from the Samag, Lt du Toit saw how many people had kit tied to the outside, making the company very rag-tag. *"Julle lyk of julle van die oorlog af kom,"* he said *"en julle is nog op pad soontoe."* [You look as if you are coming from the war, and you are still on your way there.] He ordered us to have everything packed inside the *grootsakke* when we traveled again. I wish that he had done it earlier, for by the time we went to bed that night, I realised that my poncho, the only 'waterproof' garment in our issue, had gone adrift.

We unpacked the Samag, cleaned our rifles, and by 2400 were asleep. At 0230 we were woken, and told that we were leaving at 0300. We were soon packed, on the Samils, and on our way to Mmabatho. Our drivers were driving Buffels in the same convoy as we were. Along the way one of the Buffels broke down, and was abandoned next to the road.

We stopped at some place with a huge hangar, transferred to the Buffels, and loaded ammunition and ratpacks. In the gloom we were able to see a helicopter and armoured cars.

We each loaded another 60 rounds in magazines. On other Buffels the people loaded up to 270 rounds. Used to carrying 10 rounds, this seemed like tremendous firepower. We wore our normal patrol kit of chest webbing and water bottle.

We stopped at a collection point in Mmabatho. Here the company commander gave instant orders: our task was to clear the Molopo military base of the rebels. We were to search the base for men in grey uniforms, arms and ammunition. From there we left in a convoy: 1 Ratel (90 ?), 18 Eland armoured cars, 2 Samil trucks, 2 Ambulances and 10 Buffels. As we drove through Mmabatho/Mafikeng, we were given the order "Weapons State 3", meaning a round in the chamber. Immediately there were two shots. It was fired by Barry, a weak little boy in Platoon 3, who must have got his drills wrong. He succeeded in missing his platoon commander. These were the only shots fired that day. We drove past the Molopo Sun Hotel to the Molopo Military Base of the Bophuthatswana Army.

We drove straight into the base, and stopped the Buffels in a row on the road, widely spaced. The platoon debussed, formed up in a line on the edge of the road, and swept northward. I was left on the Buffel as a vehicle guard, and watched the proceedings from there. I could see the prisoners being collected on the parade ground, made to lie face down. Lt Du Toit showed his qualities in command here, directing the platoon very well. At the end of the operation we got the radio message "Well done, two four."

After the sweep we had time to eat something from the ratpacks, during another long wait. It started raining again, and we got a little wet. We were jealous of the armour guys who could close up in their armoured cars. [This rain caused extensive floods in other parts of the country.] The whole company then went to the assembly hall in the base, a large hall with a large stage and a balcony, where we dumped our kit.

Platoon 4 was just then called. We hurried to the Buffels, and buckled up. When the Lt said *"Drywer, ry!"* [Driver, go!] we found that we had no driver. The driver we had used that morning was not of our platoon, and when we were called he had not come with us. Our own driver was on one of the other Buffels. This confusion was cleared up in a minute, and we then went on patrol around the Independence Stadium, where the ministers had been held the previous day. We later learned that this was an outside cordon for a search. By that time it was raining steadily, and I got soaked to the skin, and very cold. I probably had slight hypothermia by the end of that action, I simply sat and slept in my seat, with no interest whatsoever in what was going around me. After a while we stopped under the massive stands of the stadium, which gave a little shelter. Back at the hall we found that beds and mattresses had been carried in, and we slept there that night.

On Friday morning at 0600, our section went to guard the magazine. We manned the four bunkers at the corners of the magazine, and had two roving guards on the walls. At 1430 half of us were relieved, and I went straight to bed. At 1700 we had supper, and after that I relieved the vehicle guards so that they could go and eat. After that I had my first shower (at the back of the stage) since the Tuesday afternoon. Shortly after that I went to the HQ building to guard the room in which a prisoner was being questioned. (Earlier Volschenk had had the privilege of guarding the prisoner while he was being questioned.) Crause and I stood outside the door, but later some of the officers brought us chairs. I seem to remember that there was somebody guarding the window as well. The prisoner being questioned was sergeant-major Phiri. Some members of Platoon 4 was present when the senior officers involved in the coup attempt were stripped of their rank. The pips disappeared.

I was relieved at 2300. At 2400 I was woken and sent to guard the weapons safe. Ristow and I stood there until 0615. We had some coffee in the middle of the night, for I had packed the leftovers of my ratpack in my chest webbing.

On Saturday morning, after parade, we went to bed. We slept the whole day, waking only for lunch.

After supper on Saturday 13 February the whole platoon went to guard the magazine. We stood guard according to the normal routine (three hours on/six hours off) sleeping in the guard tents in the magazine, until 0200, when somebody saw something, and we all stood ready in the bunkers. A investigation showed nothing, and the rest of the night went without incident.

When the 0900 beat started, we were told that the rest of the company was going to withdraw. By 1130 we were relieved by members of the BDF. When we got back to the hall, all the beds but our platoon's had been removed, and there was nobody left. We were now on standby, a reaction force for any sudden occurrences. There was also a BDF reaction force, that also spent most of its waking time hanging around in the canteen.

This description of Operation *Adding*, up to here, was made from a few pages of notes I made on this Sunday, after everybody else had left.

We had one or two meals with the BDF. It was prepared more in the traditional way, and not the way we were used to. It consisted of a large serving of pap, a small one of a sheba, a thin gravy with bits of meat, and a helping of vegetables. It was the best pap I have had before or since.

Once we were alone, activity suddenly stopped. Our platoon was on standby, with nothing to do but wait for orders. We guarded our Buffels, two at a time. We had a small Toyota truck, driven by Marx. We had a medic with us, especially detached for Op *Adding*, and I think he had an ambulance.

We had the whole hall to live in. Our beds were arranged around the hall. Mine was right up front, under the stage. I found a small table on the stage, and a chair, and set it up as a desk next to my bed, and got out my books to do a little studying.

One section guarded the houses of two brigadiers of the BDF. This made us one very stretched-out infantry company: We had Platoon 6 in Grahamstown, Platoon 5 at Rietgat, Platoon 1 in Voortrekkerhoogte, Platoons 2 and 3 on the "farm", Platoon 4 in Molopo Military Base, and one section in Mafikeng.

We no longer ate with the BDF. Our food came by Buffel from the "farm" where the rest of the company lived. After we had eaten we washed our dixies, dished up for the guards at the brigadiers'. Marx then took it to the brigadiers' guards. This was a constant source of aggravation, for there was no roster for the use of the dixies, and the house guards had no washing-up facilities and sent the dixies back unwashed.

There was an immense trade in kit between our guys and the BDF. The most popular item of the BDF was a parka-jacket, for which the SADF had no equivalent item. When we finally left, Marx had a BDF backpack full of kit. I got hold of some flashes and the identification plate of the truck as mementos. Somebody stole the poncho I had borrowed from Volschenck, probably for such a trade.

Boredom was our greatest enemy. To combat this we had the normal morning inspection parade, followed by a period of drill. (We became very good at it.) In the afternoons we had PT of power exercises in the hall and a run around the centre of the base. We once had a concert. Schwartz gave an imitation of a Zulu dance, Marx and Groenewald gave a long, rambling story in the style of Jan Spies. Then the medic gave his show: he was a ventriloquist, so he made a puppet out of a sock, and gave us a long show with all the usual gags.

On the 20th of February we withdrew from the Molopo base to the "farm". It was not actually a farm, but an agricultural showground on the north side of the road between Zeerust and Mafikeng. There were a number of large steel barns (hangars), in two of which we lived. The E and F Squadrons of 2SSB lived in the larger hangar, and we in the smaller one, that was actually being used by the farmer. The rows of livestock pens made it smell like a farm. Behind the hangars there were stables and a riding school.

In the open space between the hangars and the road stood the vehicles, our few Buffels to the west, 2SSB's Elands and Ratels to the west.

Before we could move in, we first had to remove a layer of manure from the concrete floor. (It is not as bad as it sounds, because it was hard and dry, and fairly easy to shovel up.) Some of the other platoons actually slept on heaps of maize chaff. When the farmer removed his truck we had more space. The implements that stood in the corner made a good place to hang up clothes.

Our duty was to be on immediate standby in case of another disturbance in Bophuthatswana. For this the vehicles were kept ready, and we had to lay out our emergency kit in readiness in one section of the hangar: chest webbing, *staaldak* and waterbottle. In case of action each could grab his kit from the appointed place, and no time would be lost in preparation.

A kilometre or two down the road there was a game farm. The first Sunday after our arrival we went game viewing, riding on the Samils with the canvas removed. I remember some days later sitting and cleaning my rifle one morning at sunrise and hearing the lions roaring. Wonderful Africa.

After a few days like this we got into a routine. Reveille at 0600, inspection at 0700, breakfast at 0800, movies until lunch, movies until PT at 1600, shower at 1700, supper, news, movies. This routine was often interrupted by rain.

Television and video became very important. Morning parade started when Body Beat had finished. After breakfast there was a video, and two

videos after lunch. The evening show started at around 2100, after the news at 2000. Booyens, one of my friends from the storeman's course that was now in Platoon 2, had his mattress right in front of the TV set, so that I always had a good seat to watch from when I wanted to see the movie. I actually started following the soap opera 'Santa Barbara.'

We had a trailer shower for washing, parked on a cattle-loading ramp. The unit had a petrol engine and gas water-heaters. We had a daily shower parade. After PT, at 1700, we fell in outside the hangar, dressed for shower. That is, with very little clothes, towel, and washing gear. We then marched the little way around the hangars to the shower, where we fell out, undressed and queued in two rows on the shower ramp. Once inside the shower, the water was switched on for 30 seconds, and you had time to get yourself wet. The water was then switched off for 30 seconds of washing, and then switched on for one whole minute of rinsing. To save time you usually rubbed shampoo into your dry hair while still in the queue.

There were no facilities for washing dishes. After meals we washed our dixies and stuff with cold water under a running tap. With a little experimenting I found that the best way to remove grease was with a handful of the lush Kikuyu grass that grew in the fences. For washing clothes there were a number of large galvanised steel tubs. There was a row of chemical toilets (rockets) behind the stables, and `lilies' [urinals] scattered all over. There was no sewerage, and all the water we used for washing, including the shower outlet, was dropped on the spot. This created huge pools of mud that was daily churned by the vehicles that drove through it. Normally the Army would dig suitable sewers and drainage, but I presume that because we were on private property we could not do that. And in any case we were there only temporarily.

We had more injuries during this waiting time than during the action. Our company commander, at that time a Captain Van Rensburg, tore ligaments in his foot from playing volleyball. Lt du Toit was thrown from a horse, and injured his shoulder.

At this stage I must recount an incident that people find amusing, although it was quite painful for me. I had lost a button from my shirt one morning, and with inspection Corporal Bessinger noticed it and told me to sew it back on. By the next morning I had not yet done it, and I had no other clean shirt to put on, so in a flash of invention I stuck the button on the buttonhole with Prestik [a sticky kind of poster putty]. Alas, it was not good enough. The Prestik held the button on the shirt wonderfully, but the corporal noticed. The excuse that I did not have a sewing kit was too thin, and day or two later I had a good session of running around for punishment.

Communications home was very poor. Mail went to Zeerust daily, but our mail still came via Rietgat, once a week or less. There was no telephone available, except when we went on bank pass. Some of the guys found a way to telephone. They would slip away at night and walk up the road to the game lodge, where there was a public telephone. This soon caused trouble; a VCR was stolen from the lodge, and a witness said one of the suspects had carried a rifle. To find out who it was they made us run up and down for a bit, but nobody squealed. We were not impressed at being singled out, for there was

no similar action taken at 2SSB. In any case, the police or MPs never turned up, so I supposed it was not taken too seriously.

We had a number of visits from high officers. The first was General Kat Liebenberg, then Colonel Stroebel, OC of 6 SAI, and then General Turner, chief of the Bophuthatswana Defence Force. They were full of praise, and explained what had happened, and why we were still there. Genl. Turner presented a sword to 2SSB, and a shield to 6 SAI. Earlier on we had each received a little card with a message of appreciation from the commander of North West Command. We were also each issued a personalised certificate of participation in Operation Adding from the commander of 2SSB, and a copy of the commendation certificate awarded to B Company, 6 SAI.

There was a continuous expectation of our imminent departure, but it was postponed time after time. At one stage we got as far as loading our luggage on the Samil, cleaning up the hangar and wiring up the doors, when we got the message that we were to stay, after a day of waiting. [I was to remember this on the border, when the men complained that they had to maintain a base that was going to be abandoned soon.]

Our next period of leave was also postponed by two weeks. On getting this news, the married men were each given a weekend leave. I am not sure that this was a good idea: afterwards I spent hours walking around the riding school's track with Groenewald, when the excitement of his visit had died away, and he had become very unhappy at being away from home.

One thing I remember from this time was the *draadkarre* [toy cars made out of wire.] There were amongst others, a copy of a Samil and an articulated truck. The fact that the R4s have a built-in wire cutter must have had something to do with this.

At long last we finally left, permanently. A mixed convoy of Army buses came to pick us up one morning, and we traveled back to Pretoria and Rietgat. We arrived at Rietgat during the evening, and found ourselves in darkness, as all the electric lights in our tents had disappeared during our absence. The next day or two we spent packing up, and having our hair cut, and getting the base ready for hand-over.

We were impressed by the return travel arrangements: 28 Squadron SAAF would fly us from Waterkloof AFB to Port Elizabeth. We were a large company, and it would take two flights of the C-130 Hercules to get us all down. It was arranged that Platoon 1, 2 and Coy HQ would take the first flight, and Platoons 3, 4 and 5 would take the second flight. Our platoon commander was a two-pip Lieutenant, and commanded the second flight. The first flight left early in the morning, and the remaining flight finalised the base arrangements. In the middle of the morning we (the second flight) arrived at Waterkloof, only to find the first flight still there. Not "still there" but actually "back again"; the flight had taken off, and had landed again more-or-less at the appointed time. When they disembarked, they found themselves back at Waterkloof. Apparently the aeroplane had developed engine trouble, and had turned back to base. When the problem was fixed, the first flight re-embarked, and took off again. Now we had to wait the whole time it took the Hercules to fly to PE and back. I got tired of waiting in the terminal building, so I took the chance when somebody was needed to guard the luggage on the apron; it was more interesting to watch the airport activities. A long while later we were

again loading the Samils: the aeroplane had developed engine trouble again, and we would not be flying at all, but some buses would be arranged for the next day, so that we could drive down. Very dispiriting, especially to one who had spent the whole afternoon looking at a Hercules sitting idly on the apron.

We were taken to Voortrekkerhoogte, where supper and accommodation had been arranged. We queued into a white-plate mess; and queued out again when we found we needed our own cutlery, which was packed away in our luggage. Instead we loaded the hotboxes of food, and were taken to our sleeping quarters (13 Reception Depot, if I recall correctly), where we had supper. I was nice to be back in civilisation, even if it was a converted jail. We had hot water to wash our dixies in, normal showers, a room with brick walls to sleep in, and *telephones*. I recall that the spirit was very good that evening.

The next morning at around 0900 the buses were there to take us to Grahamstown. (The buses were not from Elwierda, as usual, but from a small company, Bus Henk) It was the quickest bus trip I every had between Pretoria and Grahamstown.

As soon as the whole company was together again in Grahamstown, we were introduced to one of the nice 6 SAI traditions: if a company returns from operations, there is a meal waiting. Not an ordinary meal, but a mixed grill eaten from white plates, with wine or beer. The OC or 2IC is there to welcome you back, and there is a speech or two. The best thing about it is that the food is waiting, no matter what time of the night you arrive. It makes you feel appreciated.

The journey for going on leave was not very nice. The army was paying for the transport, as the leave included the "seven days" guaranteed leave of the first year of National Service. They got us two huge Railways buses, which were not very comfortable. The driver stopped in Bedford, the first town outside Grahamstown, and many men bought alcohol. The result was that a bunch of good guys turned into a lot of drunken bums, and behaved very badly. The bus had to stop in every town to allow the guys who did not pee in the bus to go to the toilet, so that the journey dragged on. Nevertheless, we got safely to Johannesburg, and had a wonderfully long leave of 23 days, starting on the 2nd of April.

Mosita Base

On our return from leave, B-Company was disbanded. It was now late April and the previous intake would be clearing out soon and it was time for take-over training. All this meant was that the infrastructure personnel of the old intake (*oumanne*) and the new intake would work together, for a transfer of experience. We spent one morning in the transport hangar, where the appointments to the posts were finalised. There were some rude surprises. Barnes, who had been slated for the post of Conservationist, was made an ordinary admin clerk, because he had applied for transfer, and while it was pending he could fill this rather long-term post.

As I expected, I was appointed C-Company storeman, along with Jan Ras.

Once we were appointed, we were immediately whisked away by the Charlie CSQM, and taken to the Charlie lines. It was a bit like coming home, for I got the same cubicle I had occupied on first coming to 6 SAI.

For the first few days there were little to do. Charlie were still on leave, and the most we could do was a little orientation.

Almost immediately there was another transfer: the 'ROO' course started a day or two later. (ROO: *Regimentsonderoffisier*. RNCO, Regimental non-commissioned officer. They are the 'section leaders' of the infrastructure personnel.) All the pay clerks went, Chris Orr, and Ras. I was a little disappointed in not going: as 'runner up' to the 'Best Student' award for the storemans's course, I thought I had this chance of gaining rank.

Our three chefs, Fourie, Collatz and Greyling, had no work to do and worked, at their request, in the Battalion kitchen until the end of training.

Once the rest of the company came back from leave, they went straight to work, training in COIN (Rural) operations. We (or I, at least) were shocked at the poor discipline of the company.

For me, the work was not hard or difficult. It took some time before I got used to the way things worked, for I had nobody to train me. Jan Lottering, who had been storeman before me, had started basics with us, but for medical reasons never completed it. He never had any formal storeman training, and as there was a course presented at this time, he went on it. All I had was a short introduction. Mealtimes were a pleasure. I no longer marched to meals with the company, but usually grabbed a plate and cutlery from the store and went when it suited me. I often never bothered with meals at all. We had a kettle and all the appliances for making coffee in the store, and I found that black, sweet coffee makes a fine substitute for a meal.

Being in the company HQ now, I had to get used to working with officers and NCOs. As a rifleman I had learned that it was best to avoid them, but now I had to work with them every day. I had to learn the way softly-softly, and had a close shave with Lt Von Holt, when I barged into an order group he was conducting and with unsuitable banter demanded a signature from one of the platoon sergeants (Corporal Botha) attending.

The three platoon commanders in the company were very different in the way they worked. On a day that lectures were scheduled, the three platoons would have identical needs from the store. Lt Von Holt would come the previous evening and bring me a list of what he would need the next day. Lt Heydenrich usually came in the morning and told me what he needed. Lt Hangelbroek would rush into the store at the last minute, and beg me to help him with a few things.

There were enough desks in the store, so I brought my briefcase to the store, and spent most of my time there, working and studying. I must admit that the relaxation of discipline also affected me, and I often let the store grow rather dirty and untidy while I studied. I was rather offended one day when the CSM (WOII Van Rooyen) accused me of reading paperbacks instead of cleaning.

During this time I also discovered a different kind of species: the NSM sportsmen. These were men who excelled in sport, and were therefore excused from operational duty, and stayed in base to play for the unit. The two in our company were the Mortar and Assault Pioneer storemen, respectively. I never saw them do any real work.

After a week or two I moved with the company to the bush. We lived in bivvies, in a temporary base. For the final evaluation of the company

practically my whole store went to Penn Rock, a small simulated base on the far side of the training area. (We even took the kitchen, and a chef!) It all went out, and after a day or three it all came back, and a few days later we had to clear out. Lots of work for the lonely storeman.

The company's ill-discipline paid off. They failed one aspect of evaluation, and had to squeeze in a day or two of retraining and re-evaluation. (I should say that I contributed to their failure. An evaluator asked me at what time *klaarstaan* was, and I answered, at random, "7 o'clock." As the time was wrong, it surely detracted from their points, as everybody in base is supposed to participate in stand-to.)

We were expecting to go to the border after this phase of training, but when the orders came we heard that we were being sent to Vryburg, in the Northern Cape Command, for "orientation and acclimatisation" before going to the border proper. During the preparations for deployment, I saw how much sense it made for the company HQ to have experience in deployment before they start with the first deployment themselves.

On the Monday we left for Vryburg in the famous Elwierda buses, with a brief stop at Kimberley, for some reason. We arrived at a sports club in Vryburg, where we were given a welcome and introductory briefing by some commander.

We slept in the hall of the club, and were ready to go on to our base the next morning. It was freezing cold that morning, with ice in the Buffel seats. We had been issued newly reconditioned vehicles, with nothing on the clock.

We took over from a company of a CF regiment wearing black boots and white web-belts. (The Cape Town Highlanders?)

Our base at Mosita was a clearing in the almost-Kalahari bush, with a few tents in neat rows, and one or two huge camel-thorn trees.

It got very cold, freezing at times. Frost on the inside of the tent roof was a common sight in the mornings. Fortunately the water-bunker (a Samil-50 with a water tank) froze only once.

There was very little to do at Mosita. I put myself in charge of the tent store. After that I had got it in order, I put myself in charge of the kit store, where the men came to store their kit while they were on patrol. I got a touch of flu at one time, but I didn't even bother reporting sick. I just spent the day or two it lasted on a stack of mattresses in the store.

The company's job was to patrol the SA/Botswana border and areas inland, and to prevent ANC insurgents infiltrating beyond that region. Some patrols went out on foot, but others moved by vehicle and put up roadblocks.

By all accounts the people on patrol had a very good time. They slept late, had no parades, tanned in the sun, and had almost no check on them. But that is their story, not mine.

The farmers in the region were very friendly, and often entertained the troops. The Captain also made use of their hospitality, and al least once we had a *potjiekos* as a result of one of his *poa* hunting expeditions. At another time he made use of the offer of a flight in an aeroplane to inspect his troops from the air, and found them tanning in the sun. His response was to put them on a forced march back to base. They traveled the greater part of this on a farmer's trailer. (This is anecdotal, and probably a combination of two stories.)

One section of Assault Pioneers patrolling close to the Botswana border caused an International Incident. I do not know the exact location of the incident, but the patrol wanted to get to a shop close to the border. They looked at the map, and saw that there was a bulge in the border between them and the shop. They took a shortcut. When the women and children that saw them ran away screaming, they knew that they were in trouble, and made haste to get back to the SA side of the fence. After an incredibly short interval they were removed from their patrol, and interrogated by senior Army officers. In the end nothing happened to them.

On that evening's news there was an item about a complaint of South African commandos operating in Botswana. In rEtaleation the Botswana authorities arrested a South African tourist for "possessing military equipment", and the SA Government warned tourists not to go to Botswana. (You're only guilty of what you're caught doing. The authorities did not know about the times they hung tin cans on the border fence and used it for target shooting. This is very close to an act of war.)

A horrible accident happened at the end of our tour. A farmer had invited the patrol on his farm to a *braai*. At the end of the party, the host took one of his civilian guests home in his *bakkie*. Four of our men went along for the ride. On returning from the drop-off, the (civilian) driver took a wrong turn-off in the farm road, and drove at speed along a disused track, and into a donga. All three inside the cabin (two NSM and the driver) were killed instantly, and the two NSM on the back were thrown out, and seriously injured.

I cannot remember the feeling in the company after the news came out, but I remember that when Capt. Nigrini summoned us to the VTB-tent, we were very subdued. I have never seen him more tired than that night. He explained to us what had happened, and told us to forget it as soon as possible.

Two officers came up from Grahamstown to form part of the RVO (*"Raad van Ondersoek":* `Board of Inquiry').

We were relieved by A-Coy, 6 SAI. We had been operational for about a month, but there was evidently some pressure to get us to the border. There were many reports about people being called up for camps. One of the pay clerks said all the Parabats at his father's work had been called up. A cousin of mine was called up for a camp, and their only job was to pitch tents for an enormous transit camp at Wallmansthal.

After relief we went to the other base of the company, in a disused school hostel in Bray, on the border with Botswana. This base has a tradition that everybody must jump in the pool on the first night. We were ordered to dress in PT clothes, informally marched in single file around the pool, ordered "left turn!" and then "one step forward, march!" Splash! The rest of the evening the "Bray *oumanne*" searched for people who had evaded this initiation.

In Bray I drank soda water for the first time, because there were nothing else left in the canteen.

On way back we slept at the same sports club in Vryburg, but in a different, and much smaller, hall. There was a lot of disorder, and as we carried our mattresses in it appeared that not all of us were going to fit in, and some started preparing beds outside. At this point the Captain took over direct

control of the company. Only now that I look back do I realize that the morale/discipline in the company was so low that he could not trust anybody to carry out his orders without supervision. He ordered everybody out, and supervised the repacking of the mattresses and kit, and when he was done everybody had a (small) place inside to sleep in. Afterwards he personally inspected us, and ordered haircuts where necessary.

When we were back in Grahamstown, Ras and I had to return to the store the kit of our two casualties, as part of our job as storemen. The kit came in two boxes, and included, to our surprise, the clothes they had been wearing at the time of the accident. Ras had to rush out and be sick outside, but I felt little more than than disgust at handling dirty clothes. Months later I heard the rumour that the deceased had not been killed instantly. Having seen those clothes, I think it very unlikely.

We went on 10 day's leave, returning on the 17th of July, 1988.

This account will not be complete without a reference to Antjie. Antjie (*die rooi-bruin hen*) was a chicken obtained by one of the patrols, probably traded by the locals for a blanket or two. Originally her job was to relieve the tedium of rat-packs, but by the time she had spent two days riding on a *grootsak* a bond had formed between her and her handler that could not simply be cut with a knife. She joined the platoon, and went on leave with us.

The first thing that happened when we got back from leave, was that we got a new CSM, a S/Sgt (de Wet?). He quickly shook the company from its lethargy, simply by insisting on the usual punctuality, orderliness and respect.

On 20 July 1988 we left 6 SAI by SAMIL and bus for PE airport, flew from there to Grootfontein in a SAFAIR Boeing 707. From Grootfontein we drove by Wit Olifant (white-painted open articulated trucks) to Oshivelo, sitting on our kit.

At Oshivelo the company did re-training: this consisted of general orientation, instilling Operational Area SOPs, and evaluating the company's ability. Apparently our mortarists had the highest ever score for evaluation at Oshivelo. The assault pioneers departed a few days in advance to Ondangwa/Oshakati, to have hearing tests for qualification on the mine detectors, and special mine training: there they apparently scored 100% in mine identification.

We shared the training time with a company from 7 SAI. We felt much superior to them, especially after a rather amusing incident: When the propelling charge of a 81 mm mortar fails to ignite, the projectile sits at the bottom of the barrel, rendering the weapon useless. There is a special device, called a bomb extractor, which can be lowered down the mortar muzzle to grab the bomb and pull it out. During the training or evaluation, the one 7 SAI mortar crew had just this stoppage. They put their bomb extractor to use, but without following their drills exactly. Because they had failed to retract the firing pin of the mortar, the bump with the extractor was enough to ignite the charge. Boom! went the bomb, carrying the extractor with it. Nobody was hurt, but the instructors made the company sweep the ground from the mortar to the strike point, searching for the extractor.

An interesting experience was when they introduced us to three ex-Plan guerillas, who had joined 101 Bn. They demonstrated their skill in anti-

tracking, and planted a dummy landmine. They then challenged the company to lift the mine, and were duly impressed by the way our CSM did it.

Life in Oshivelo was in tents, and eating ratpacks. We lived inside the walls, not too far away from the central complex: apparently the usual accommodation was outside. A lasting first impression was the amount of sand: including the ease of pitching tents. The company HQ had the worst time, I think: we had little to do, and were made to pitch and re-pitch the tents until the company lines were a neat as could be. I became the CSMs batman, after a fashion, and spent long hours in the cool bathroom washing clothes.

Our first anniversary of starting National Service (3 August) was during this time. Not a festive occasion at all, but lots of reminiscence about how nice it was in the Air Force: a very large proportion of C-Company stayed on after basics.

Every time we spoke to the Oshivelo base personnel, they asked us where we were going. (By that time we knew we were going to Eenhana.) Every time we were then told how close Eenhana was to the border, and how dangerous it was. One rumour had it that the water tower had been hit by a mortar, and that the base now depended on the swimming pool for water. The SACC were particularly prone to distributing these kinds of stories.

On our last day at Oshivelo there was a rugby match between 6 SAI and the local rugby team. A game for tough people: there was not a blade of grass on the whole of the playing field. Jannie Ras succeeded in breaking his jaw during this game, and had to go to 1 Mil for treatment. He was one of the three storemen in the company.

We left Oshivelo again by *Wit Olifant*, to go to Ondangwa. There we were received in the transit camp: not much more than tents and a permanent bathroom block. The Ondangwa transit camp was on the terrain of the Ondangwa air base. The airport terminal was just a little down the road from there. Again the lasting impression is of white sand.

There was quite a war-atmosphere at Ondangwa: the C-130s spiraling in from altitude before landing, the Alouette gunships going on patrol before every take-off. I was particularly impressed by the Tigershark AA missiles mounted on top of the reservoir behind the transit camp. Also interesting were the three layers of netting suspended above the strongpoint for the fighter aircraft, although we believed it to be an ops room of some kind at the time. The nets are supposed to ensure that mortars that fall on the hangars detonate in the air, and not on, or under, the roof. There was also an obviously Soviet AA missile carrier driving around the air base.

After a day or two in the transit camp, on 3 August 1988, the bulk of the company went by convoy to Eenhana. Most of the company HQ stayed until the Friday, and went with the Rum-Run. We flew in a C-160 Transall, the first and last time I saw one land at Eenhana. The plane flew in a cargo of sandbags and a generator.

The flight was less exciting than I thought it would be. It was very hot, and the view very limited, with the windows so high up the fugselage, and under orders to stay seated. Only when the aircraft banked steeply did some trees and bush become visible, and in any case the flight lasted only ten minutes.

Getting out of the plane at Eenhana was a great relief, after the heat inside. We were met at the plane by our CSM, and taken to our sleeping place: we walked along concrete walkways, the ring road, little bridges over the drainage ditches, past tents and buildings until we came to a ridge of sand: here the Staff stopped and said *"Hier is julle slaapplek."* That is where we lived for the next week or two, in the little bunkers on the eastern wall. Later we got a tent to live in, but very often we had a *'rooi klaarstaan'*, when we had to sleep on the walls.

There was tremendous activity going on. Around the whole base a second wall was being built, and outside of that a minefield being laid. A contractor was putting up the 90 meter high radio mast. Shortly after us there arrived an AA contingent from *Regiment Oos-Transvaal*. The base was crowded to the limits. Outside the base was the armour of 63 Mechanised Battalion. Their infantry came from 8 SAI. At first they were lightly dug in outside the base, but as soon as the new wall was finished they moved inside that, where the Ratels were parked hull-down, and the riflemen dug their trenches on top.

It was pretty noisy for newcomers. I remember lying in our little bunker at night, being shaken awake by the noise of a landmine going off: this usually meant that a goat had wandered into the minefield. One night on guard duty, I heard a mine go off, and the goat bleating. Then there was a second explosion, followed by quiet. A disturbing reminder that the minefield was very dangerous. As usual, newcomers were welcomed with a fireplan, a regulated live fire of weapons on the base. It was scheduled at night, and at you got a great fright when the shooting first started. After the second or the third time you just watched the fireworks and went to sleep again. One of the enduring memories I have is the beautiful sound of a Ratel idling in the night, charging its batteries.

One of the sappers that was employed in laying the minefield wanted to know if it was possible to trigger the mine detonator by finger pressure alone. It was, and he was casevac-ed, leaving some of his fingers behind.

We had two little mongrel dogs in the base, Rev and Lootie. One night a mine went off, and the next morning two Intelligence corporals went to look what had triggered the mine.

"Dis Rev daai"

"Nee, dis nie Rev nie. Rev het vier bene."

After that only Lootie was left. I don't know what happened to him, but there was no tragic ending.

It was obvious enough that all this activity was for nothing. Often enough the pipeline bringing water to Eenhana was blown up by the terrs, and we had to go without running water, until the pipeline was repaired. (The pipeline supplied the civilians in the town, and the military base was only one of the users.)

We had enough water stored up. All over the base there was "s-tanks", large rubber dams like pumpkins, dug into the ground. Before you went to the toilet, you got a firebucket of water from the s-tank, and you flushed by simply emptying the bucket into the toilet.

I was soon obvious that we were superfluous. The base was still supplied with plenty of manpower by the incumbent SACC Support Company. We had

arrived a month too early, and it was only by September that they left and we fitted into our normal slot.

Only with time did the operations Moduler, Hooper and Packer become common knowledge, and it was only much later, when I read Römer-Heitman's *"War in Angola: the final South African phase"*, that I came to realize how close we came to a full-scale war between FAPLA/Cuba and the SADF.

I started work in the QM stores. One of our first jobs was to send back all the MAGs in the unit (40 in all), I presume for replacement. They first had to be cleaned, and I can well believe that they needed replacement, most of the gas ports on these MAGs were so blocked that I'm sure they could not operate properly any more.

Our Quartermaster was Captain Strydom. A bitter little man, but pretty capable.

From what I gather from my letters, I quickly rose in responsibility. When the Lieutenant in charge went on leave I had to submit the daily requisitions, which were sent out by radio.

Supplies reached the unit by road and air. 54 Bn had five bases: Eenhana was the Battalion HQ. There were two bases on the tar road south of Oshakati, named Okatope, Okankolo and Miershoop, and one to the east of Eenhana, called Nkongo. Each of these stationed a rifle company and an 81 mm mortar section. Stores for Okatope, Okankolo and Mieshoop were easy to deliver by tar road, and because they were on the other side of Oshakati/Ondangwa from us, had their own supply system. But Nkongo and Eenhana could only be reached by unpaved, "red" road, often mined. Every second Wednesday a convoy, lead by minesweeper vehicles, departed from Oshakati, and came to Eenhana, and passed on to Nkongo. On Mondays and Fridays the SAAF flew a number of sorties to Eenhana and Nkongo, known as the Rum-run. On these flights were passengers, frozen food, mail and other light cargo.

At the time we had the mine threat under control. In all the time I spent at 54 Bn, I can remember only two incidents: a Buffel with a SACC section hit a double mine next to the pipeline, (Notnagel, the diver, was burnt by the detonation) and a 32 Bn Kwêvoël hit a mine on the road to Etale.

I got to working quite hard, and I've heard a rumour that I was nominated to be NSM of the month. But this had a price; I had no more time to study. The only decent working place I could find was the coffee bar, and this had plenty of distractions; not the least of these were the games of Trivial Pursuit with Chris Orr, Ian Card and others. I was pretty happy then, when our company commander, Lt Köhne asked me, to become the chaplains clerk. This would mean a much easier job, with much more time to spare. This happened while Capt. Strydom was away. When he came back, he was very much upset when he came back and found the best of his storemen taken away. He let me choose what I wanted to do, and I chose the chaplain clerk job. The choice was made easier, because during the discussion he had called my Company Commander 'boetie.' Lt Köhne was a 1-pip Lieutenant, he was very young and not very bright, but he was my commander, and I respected him.

At that time there were two chaplains at 54 Bn. The first was actually the EP Command chaplain, on a border trip, attached to 63 Mech. The other was a

NSM Lieutenant Van As, the 54Bn chaplain. They had exchanged roles, Lt Van As serving 63 Mech, and the other an older man, staying in the base.

The coffee bar at Eenhana was an extension to the chaplain's office and bedroom. Like most of the buildings at these bases it was built of corrugated iron and shadow netting, with a concrete floor. The chaplain's office and bedroom itself was built of concrete blocks, and it was obvious how the place had grown from that in stages.

I can't remember how it came about, but after a while I was not required to stand guard any more. My working hours prevented me from being on my post as required by regulations. I was also limited to standing guard only third beat, which was not deemed fair. The only other mustering with this privilege was the signalers, who worked to their own schedule.

Because the drivers were always a ready body of manpower, it was decided that only a limited number of drivers could stand beat at one time, and that these were chosen by the drivers themselves. Mortarists did not stand guard, because they had to man the mortars in an emergency. What this meant was that when there were no SACC platoon in base, the HQ had to do very regular guard duty.

Dress during working hours was browns, boots, bush hat, rifle and loaded magazine. (For safety's sake rifles were carried at 'state 0' inside the base: 'state 3' outside, i.e. with a round in the chamber.) As alternative to the bush hat we were also allowed to wear a baseball cap with the unit emblem, which was sold in the canteen. After hours it was anything you like, although dinner was only served to people wearing closed shoes and a shirt with a collar. This requirement was applied relaxed enough to not really improve dress quality during meals, in my opinion.

All the little specialist jobs in the base had *"tiffy"*-titles. There was the pool tiffy, the water tiffy, and then there was me, the coffee-tiffy.

The daily routine must have been something like this:

Reveille 6:00, parade 7:00, brunch 10:00, knock-off 16:00, supper 17:00, parade at 18:00. At first we had no siesta. The OC was against it because he said after siesta there was no work got done. As the weather heated up he relented, and a siesta between 13:00 and 14:00 was instituted.

Saturdays: work until 13:00

Sundays: no work.

At morning parade we had the dominee *'lees en bid'*, and after that we got the orders for the day. The OC would read to us all the incidents of the previous day, and an Intelligence officer would read us the news, which he got by listening to the shortwave broadcast of the SABC. After an *"uittree"* we would break up and go do the job for the day.

Evening parade had no news, only a short intelligence warning of what we could expect, and after parade we had a *'klaarstaan'* (stand to). Here we went to our designated defence position on the walls, while the radio nets were tested. In theory the most likely time for an attack is at dusk, when there is still enough light, but the coming darkness would hinder the pursuit of the fleeing attackers. Wall commanders have to assign you your arc of fire during this time, and all wait until darkness. In practice we sat down on the wall, chatting and smoking, until the stand down came. Not a bad way to end the day. After stand down we would change clothes and start the business of the

evening, until lights out at 22:00. Sometimes we had a *'rooi klaarstaan'* when, after lights out, we would go back to the walls, and sleep there.

After parade in the mornings there was a hiatus while the base was cleaned up, and the officers had their daily conference. Then there usually were a number of junior officers and NCOs drinking coffee. The rest of the day I spent cleaning up, washing the mugs, sweeping the floor. In the afternoon I usually had some time to study. The coffee bar came into swing after supper, and went roaring on until lights-out at 22:00. After that I had to clean and lock up, to be ready for the next morning.

We once went into Eenhana town to sell bibles and hymn books. The bibles sold quickly, only problem was that there were not enough bibles in Kwanyama, the local Owambo dialect. The others were in Ndonga. The hymn books were obviously coveted, but were much more expensive than the bibles.

The other memorable incident was that I lost my rifle on this day. I knew I had brought it back from the town, but I was very scared of being accused of losing it there. I reported this immediately, but it was found only the next day in the Admin office. I suspect that one of the SACC troops took it by accident, and when he found himself with two, quietly dumped it in the office. Nothing much came of it, though I would have been on a sticky wicket if Coetzee, our clerk, could not confirm that the rifle had not been in the office when he locked up.

The coffee-bar was open at all hours, for all comers, but coffee was only served in the mornings and evenings. My job was to ensure that the coffee-bar was always stocked with provisions, that there was always hot and chilled water, to keep the place clean and neat, and to assist the chaplain in any way he requested: which was not often since so much of his work is confidential.

Because I had a supply of condensed milk, I sometimes traded the signalers for penlight batteries for my Walkman.

Ds Van As had asked visiting delegations to send us books, and in this way he had built up quite a library, very catholic. One of my jobs was to ensure that the companies that cleared out gave back the books they had borrowed: in this way I always found that the library grew a bit, as the borrower often donated books he didn't want to pack. On the rum-run we always got the week's papers, and for these we had a real inclined newspaper table, of the kind found in public libraries. We also received popular weekly magazines but I never could keep them for more than a few days before they disappeared.

I also had to take care of the board games: Trivial Pursuit was popular among us, while the SACC played chequers and fingerboard noisily.

We also had a sound system in the coffee-bar, and I had to keep the tapes playing.

On Thursday evenings there was a Bible study, conducted by the chaplain. (It was my regular attendance of this that qualified me for the job, and the successor I recommended was also a regular.) During the Bible study the coffee bar was open only for participants. Afterwards, before the rush started, the Dominee brought out the home-made biscuits, that were sent by the women from churches in the States. These parcels were often not addressed to us, but to places like Ruacana and Oshakati. The distribution was handled by the Chaplain's Services, and I'm sure they knew what they were

doing. Anyway, I hope that by writing this, the ladies get to know that their biscuits got to the troops, and that it was truly appreciated. The only alternative was the army-supplied rusks.

With all these things going on, the coffee bar was always a busy place in the evenings, and I'm sure we gave the canteen good competition: which was the idea.

On Sundays I had to prepare the mess for the church service, by taking the lectern there and assisting with folding the tables and putting out the chairs and benches.

One Friday after brunch, I got a shock when I walked into the coffee bar, and found a woman in my coffee bar, chatting to the chaplain. It was a Captain van der Merwe, a welfare officer from Oshakati who had flown in for the day, to review some cases. After serving them coffee I went and sat quietly in my office until she had left, shocked by the sudden smell of perfume.

On the 20th of September, my birthday, we had a unit evaluation. One of the aspects being evaluated was the coffee bar. It was not an inspection, but a true evaluation of the facilities, but nevertheless the base was made spotless. I remember that one of the questions in the questionnaire was whether the coffee bar had a roof without leaks: this was the level of the evaluation.

Another aspect of the evaluation was shooting. Volunteers were asked for shooting, and I stepped forward because, despite poorish eyesight, I am a fair shot, and enjoy it. On Sunday we went for a practice shoot, and we had some fun on the shooting range. Staff Belalie, the rifle company's CSM was our range officer, and he let us do interesting things, like shooting at tins without looking through the sights. I learned a lot about practical shooting on this day. During the actual evaluation, the Sector Sergeant Major was present, but still things were only slightly more formal, and a good time was had by all. The scores were not taken individually, only the aggregate for the detachment. Despite the 'informality' all the safety drills were strictly adhered to.

PLAN had advertised a cease-fire, to start on 1 September. On this day there was enough action, but as the weeks passed by there was a gradual decrease in activity.

Somewhere during September we had a day of training on chemical warfare. (Not on waging it, but in defending against it.) We were shown a video, and what a NBC suit would look like if we were issued one, and how to put it on. We were told that South Africans had not had to face chemicals in Angola, but that Unita had. All Soviet weapons were supposedly designed to be able to deliver chemicals. The most important thing we were taught was the 9-15 second drill. When the alarm for gas was given (either by the shout of 'gas! gas!' the ringing of a bell or the sounding of a vehicle hooter), you had to shout 'gas! gas! ...' while putting on your gas mask within 9 seconds. Your then had another 6 seconds to get your skin covered. The shouting 'gas! gas!' had the double purpose of passing on the alarm, and blowing any gas you may have encountered out of the mask. This training we fortunately never even nearly needed. The young SAMS Lieutenant that presented the training was English-speaking, and some of the poor SACC riflemen had a hard time following him. The video, incidentally, was in Flemish, so most of us

Afrikaans guy could follow it, but the English again, could not. A glorious mix-up, but I think the message got through.

On Saturday 1 October a Curry-cup final was played between Western Province and Northern Transvaal. The whole war came to a standstill, so that people could listen to the broadcast. Evening parade was postponed by half-an-hour. After the parade the RSM asked for a minute of respectful silence for the losers (WP). During klaarstaan two Alouettes circled the base. On their sides were painted "N.Tvl" and *"Naas is Baas"*. (Naas is Boss: referring to the brilliant fly-half Naas Botha.) On Monday a signal from the Divisional Commander was read on parade: *"Naas en sy 14 pêlle doen dit weer."* (Naas and his 14 pals do it again.)

At some point 63 Mech went away to practice a brigade attack. During this time the base was revved, which I didn't even notice. There was some bombardment to the north east of the base, but I couldn't figure out what it was. This was at 23:00 or thereabouts, while I was drying the mugs in the coffee bar. I heard shooting in the distance, and wondered if the gunners that were stationed outside the base were shooting a fireplan, because soon enough our own mortars opened up. Walking past the mortar pits on my way to bed, I asked the mortarists what they were shooting at. Then I found out that we were actually under attack. No bomb fell inside the base: the terrs had not added booster charges to their mortars, and all the bombs fell short. Nevertheless, we were much relieved when 63 Mech came back.

(On seeing this column drive in I understood for the first time something the glory of war. It's got something to do with this huge number of powerful, expertly crafted machines, and men, superbly trained and melded into an organization, all going somewhere for a specific purpose. You have to admire it, no matter its destructive nature.)

The time for the yearly UNISA examinations came on. I had made arrangements to write my examinations at Oshakati. I flew to Ondangwa one Monday on a rum-run, and drove to Oshakati in the supply Samil. Although I wrote only three papers, I had to stay in Oshakati for four weeks, the rum-runs being spaced so inconveniently

I'm not sure what the official status was of the place I stayed in. There were a number of medics there, and a platoon of mortarists. Meals were served in a mess not far from the sleeping quarters. I remember that they had some Navy chefs there. The buildings were prefabricated structures. The bathrooms were on concrete, the bungalows elevated.

My reception there was very friendly. When I arrived there I only had a bare iron bed to sleep on, but within the first day a mattress and a steel wardrobe appeared. I shared quarters with some members of the SACC company at Eenhana, and Corporal Gavin Scott, one of our own signalers. They were all under the command of 54 Bn's liaison officer in Oshakati. Scott acted as signals specialist, ensuring that the right signals equipment were sent to the 54 bases. They had a very good life. They worked on Mondays and Fridays, when they had to help load the Daks for the rum-run. On alternate Wednesdays there was a road convoy to Eenhana and Nkongo, but I'm not sure if they were involved with that or not. I'm sure that they knew how good their wicket was, because they kept their quarters spotless, even though there was no inspections, like the medics had, but only the casual eye of a sergeant.

They also handled the mail. (One of the SACC guys was a "post tiffie".) We'd get together on a Monday, when the post had arrived, shake out the mailbag on a bed, and start sorting the mail for the different bases. This way you got your own mail very quickly, but I'm sure *Skutter* Snoeks would have frowned upon this casualness. Scott also had a censor's stamp, with which he would stamp our sealed letters.

Fire plans at Oshakati were much more impressive than at Eenhana, mostly because of the 35 mm AA artillery. The drill would be the same: while the mortars shot their fireplan, they would put a flare in the air, which the AAA would then try to shoot down. They didn't often succeed, though they sometimes set the flare swaying beneath its parachute; I suppose this is close enough to be counted as a hit. The AA rounds went up into the air, seemingly slowing down as they drifted up. At altitude the tracer would die, and nothing would be seen, until few seconds later faint flashes and crackles would come from the projectiles self-destructing.

I still have a Koevoet T-shirt I picked up under the washing line in Oshakati.

I had a very nice routine, get up at 06:00, breakfast, walk to the public (air conditioned!) library, sit and study there until lunch. Walk across to the Driehoek Kafee for lunch, and wait for the library to open again. Study from lunch until 16:00 or so, walk back to the bungalows for supper, study a bit, chat with Scott and play a game of chess, until bed at 22:00.

I remember seeing Chris van Eeden at Oshakati. He was one of our pay-clerks with whom I became friends, and had one of the more interesting HQ jobs. Once a month the paymaster had to visit all the units, and pay out the "danger-pay" in cash. Usually one of the clerks went with him, to help with the mechanics of the job. (The paymaster was one of the people wounded during the last rev of Eenhana, before our time.) I probably saw Chris over a weekend, while he was waiting for the Monday rum-run, after working at Okatope and Miershoop.

The mosquitoes ate me alive while I was in Oshakati. My feet, especially, were covered with bites. I religiously kept taking my malaria tablets. I'm sure my body evolved some sort of resistance, because mosquitoes have not bothered me much since.

When I had written all my papers I had to go back to Eenhana, but I could not get a seat on the Friday rum-run, so I had a leisurely weekend in Oshakati, swimming and washing clothes and relaxing. When I got back to Eenhana, I was made to feel very wanted: The guy who had been my replacement at the coffee bar had not performed very well.

When the time came for us to go on leave there was suddenly a hitch: nobody knew that we were due for leave. For a week or two we were much disturbed by the uncertainty, and I myself got so NAAFI that the Dominee had to ask me if I were still interested in working in the coffee bar. But after a while some troop movements were made to cover for us, and we could leave the Operational Area.

The mortar platoon from Nkongo brought a steenbokkie [antelope] with them. A corporal was in charge of it. A bushman had found it abandoned, its mother probably eaten, and brought it to base. The little antelope went with us, all the way to Grootfontein. We wondered how the corporal was going to

get away with it on the 707. He simply put it in a cardboard box, and carried it onto the plane as carry-on luggage. Unfortunately the box was too big to go under the seat or in the overhead bin, and the stewardess got suspicious. The crew didn't bother too much; they simply stuck it in the cargo hold, where it survived the trip with no problem. The SAA were not so sympathetic when the corporal tried to fly it from PE to Johannesburg. Fortunately a policeman offered to take the little creature to his farm.

Going on leave we drove to Ondangwa by *wit olifant*, and from there flew in two flights to Grootfontein by C-130, where a 707 picked us up for a flight to PE. On the 21st of November we were in Grahamstown and on the 23rd we went on leave. I went by bus. After the previous bad experience most guys chose alternative modes of travel, so that only a normal-sized and relatively luxurious bus was needed. Our leave ended on the 11th of December.

Second Border Trip

Clearing In And Retraining

The second border trip could not have been more different than the first, given that we were people from the same unit, going to the same base.

To start with, we got new junior leaders, corporals and Lieutenants fresh from Infantry School. We were not much impressed with them at the start, especially because we had to stay a few more days in Grahamstown for 'retraining' to show them how to shoot mortars and to sweep roads. We quite enjoyed being *'grensvegters'*. One often-repeated story was how the new junior leaders were overheard discussing who should wake the platoon up. But on the whole we were well-disciplined, and forgave the young ones their mistakes.

This was a bit boring for me, because I had to do two consecutive days of *baanpatrollie* (range patrol), which consisted of standing guard next to a road, and warning passing vehicles that there was shooting going on and that they were to keep to the roads. In this way I met the new OC, on his way to the shooting range in his Golf. He asked me how I liked Charlie Company, and I could say 'very much' honestly. I only found out a day or two later who he was, when he addressed us before we deployed.

Our company commander was Captain Nigrini, and our CSM S/Sgt Swart, both well-known to us from training.

Deployment

Going to the border was a nightmare. Because of the large-scale movement back to the states, they could not get a plane to fetch us from PE, but we were bused up to Waterkloof. From there we flew in a 707 up to Grootfontein. I was so tired from the night on the bus that I fell asleep before the plane had taken off, and only woke when we landed. In Grootfontein we slept in a transit camp, of which I can remember only the rudimentary toilets. This was also the place where our section leaders and ROO's received their second lines. From Grootfontein we were trucked to Ondangwa. I suppose we slept in the transit camp that night, because I had a long conversation with a platoon commander of 103 (Ovahimba) Bn, and he told us many stories of his soldiers and their time with the JMMC, and he showed us a Cuban ratpack.

He was on his way home, and it's probably the best time for a conversation like that. From Ondangwa we went in a convoy of 53 Bn Buffels to Eenhana.

We were shocked at the state of the base. It was the middle of the rainy season. It was obvious that the base had not been properly looked after. The drainage ditches were full of mud, and poles and walls had fallen over. We were especially critical, because the place had been inhabited by parabats in our absence.

The 60mm mortarists awaited us there. When 6 SAI became part of Group 7, it turned into a basic training unit only. The 60mm mortar platoon that had been part of A-Company were not needed any longer, and they were returned to us. It was a surprise to meet Shane Burger, who had shared my cubicle in basics.

Apparently we were the only company in the base at this time, and I write that we had to stand guard every second night, because of a lack of manpower. This was no doubt due to the clearing out of the *oumanne* in time for Christmas.

I got the same job in the coffee-bar, without even trying. The first time I got to the coffee-bar, the incumbent coffee-tiffy collared me and introduced me to the chaplain, and there I was.

My job changed in another sense. Instead of a permanent National Service chaplain for the unit, we were now suddenly dependent on a series of campers, experienced ministers who left their congregations for a month or two to tend to us.

Rainy Season

We arrived the week before Christmas. It was the rainy season. Everything was muddy.

The coffee-bar was located just behind the ops-room. The ops-room was sand-bagged, and during Tuesday night, the rain-soaked sandbags pushed over a retaining wall, and a load of muddy water flooded the coffee-bar. On Wednesday I dried and washed the floor, and again later the evening, and again on Thursday afternoon, and once more later in the week. Thanks to hard work by the assault pioneers the drainage was corrected, and we never had that problem again.

We had continual electrical problems, associated with the wet weather.

Christmas day was a Sunday, so already it was the most relaxed schedule we could get. We had a Sunday service, and a huge buffet lunch. On the Thursday before Christmas the deputy-minister for defence (Wynand Breytenbach?) came to visit, and before that day we worked hard to get the base back into shape.

It rained through January, and everything got wet. Fortunately the tents were pitched on concrete floors, but the wall were so sun-beaten that anything left against the side got wet. It was a totally tropical atmosphere. Our rifles rusted easily and when the sun shone the humidity became oppressive.

Working Towards Peace

Meanwhile, the implementation of Resolution 435 went ahead. Contacts had stopped, and Comops became the only activity. General George Meiring, then chief of SWATF, came to visit, and all that he wanted to know was what we were doing about Comops.

Slowly the easy-going of the war-time base life was turned into a regular-discipline peace-time routine. We had to start wearing berets, flashes and stable belts again. Afternoon PT became regular and compulsory. All the modifications that made tent life easier were done away with. Camouflage nets (used more for shade than camouflage) had to be returned, and the well-ventilated incline tent-walls were banned.

We asked the question why we should maintain the base if we were going to give it away, and there were three reasons: Because of hygiene, pride, and finally what if we needed it again?

"Loss control" (*verliesbeheer*) became important. The idea was to limit injuries due to accidents. Every injury had to be reported, however small. In this way one of the chef's parents were informed when he cut his finger with a carving knife. All the stays and guy and ropes that littered that base were marked with two-by-fours, so that they could be visible at night.

In January I spent another two weeks in Oshakati to write another set of three papers, mathematics. (For the record, I failed one miserably, one was a near hit, the last an easy pass.)

The 54 Buffels each had its own name. I remember Asterix, Obelix, Super Slyper. It was decided that these names should be removed, and the battalion coat-of-arms substituted. One of our medics, Alan, was appointed to do the artwork. Each Buffel now had the 54 insignia on the bin and on the cab.

The curfew was suspended, and the local people could now move freely at night.

Early in February we sandbagged the new sickbay. The old sickbay was a corrugated iron shack next to the western wall. The new one was built of brick, with a semi-cylindrical Armco roof, located nearer the entrance to the ring road. During two days of intensive work we removed all the sandbags from the north wall, where they were used in roofing the trenches there. Three thousand sandbags were moved in all, and we ended with a more bomb-proof sickbay. I too helped, but the chaplain fetched me back to my real work before brunch. Because it was the rainy season all the sandbags were soaked with water, and a heavy load to carry in the loose sand. It took three days.

Clinton Ross, one of our pay clerks, got chickenpox. He was the only person in the base to get it, and it remains a mystery where he got it from. The doctors must have feared an epidemic, because he was also the canteen-tiffy, and is probably the person to have physical contact with just about every troop in the unit.

One Saturday the whole base was assigned the duty of clearing the growth of plants outside the walls. This area had to be kept clear to avoid giving cover during a possible attack. One by one groups withdrew, and soon it was only myself and a pay-clerk left, hacking out the bushes between the wall and the minefield, although later some drivers joined us. By 13:00 it was knock-off time, and the area outside the minefield had not been touched. On Monday morning the 2IC, Major Piet Venter, made a big noise about it, and during siesta every man had to be out there. This time I declined, and kept myself busy in the coffee-bar sorting post. Our chief chef, Sgt Schekierka, found me there, but he left me alone. (Maybe this happened during the first trip: I remember that there were a couple of 105 guns outside the west gate,

with a camper crew. I think that by this time they had all left. The mortarists were also doing a practice shoot; one of the reasons for a lack of manpower.)

During March the Sector Games were held in Oshakati. A large contingent of 54 Bn participated, and it went well.

In a letter dated 25 March I wrote that the work had finally run out. There was simply no more work to be done that could be called "base maintenance". Instead of trying to keep us busy during the day, from 14:00 every day we had a sports tournament. It was a round-robin tournament, with the results quite meaningless, because the number of teams decreased as personnel were withdrawn.

During this time we had a company of 32 Battalion in the base, working with the JMMC on the border north of us. One of the most impressive sights was this company marching to a soccer match. They marched in a relaxed style, but it seemed that they wanted to, and were not forced. I remember them counting at PT, *"un, dos, tres, quatro"*, and one of their members jogging on the runway, and even with combat boots it seemed as if he was running on air.

In the QM-stores, all the U/S-equipment [U/S = `unserviceable'] was being discarded. It is a shame to see tents that were leaking, but deemed fit for issue, the next day condemned and dished out to the locals for nothing.

All our signals equipment was withdrawn, and by the end of the period our comms-room was a Ratel Command parked between the ops room and the admin offices.

All our group weapons were withdrawn. This meant all mortars and machine guns, and by the last days of March we were armed with platoon-level weapons only. The peace process was under way, and the implementation of Resolution 435 was to start on first day of the next month.

UNTAG

United Nations Transitional Assistance Group, or United Nations *Terrorist* Assistance Group, depending on your views. We were welcoming UNTAG, but there we were told that some things UNTAG had no right to see, which included the insides of armoured vehicles and ops rooms. Initially we had a few Pakistani officers as observers, there were a some British signallers around in their Land Rovers, and later there were Philipinos, with whom I had very little to do. We were told that the UNTAG officers were to receive the same courtesies as the SADF officers.

These UNTAG officers were definitely ill-informed. The UNTAG chief asked the Sector 10 commander why there were road-blocks on the tar road. He was under the impression that the local people were not allowed to own motor-cars.

War

The first of April was a Saturday. As usual we worked a half-day. At noon, just as we were undressing, the call went out for *klaarstaan*. With a loud moan we grabbed our chest-webbings and rifles and went to the walls. It was a pretty poor April fool's joke. We sat and lay around the trenches, not knowing what went on. The wall-commanders, the only officers, could not tell us anything either. It went on for hours. I slept a bit, uncomfortably in the rough clods of the trench. At one point I was called from the wall. Kruger, the ops-clerk wanted me to open the cupboard so that he could make tea for the

Captain. I asked him if really was an April fool's and he said yes. The Captain having had his tea, I felt disinclined to go back to the walls so I hung around the coffee-bar, probably reading a bit. Then Kruger came again, and this time he said *'daar is groot kak.'* [There is big shit!]

Eventually, late in the afternoon we were called to parade. Then the major gave us the news. SWAPO had crossed the border in large numbers, and Koevoet had suffered severe casualties. Things were very unsettled. I was clear, however, that in these large numbers PLAN could easily attack our bases, and it could be that it was their intention. A captured Army base would be a huge propaganda victory. We were given a meal and re-deployed along the walls, for defense. Fortunately we had a company of 32 Battalion in the base. They were in transit from their deployment with the JMMC, and were still armed to the teeth. They were given the north wall, which was considered the most likely point of attack. We got the south wall, overlooking the runway. The east wall had a lone patmor as a support weapon. We were very hyped up, and quite scared. While we were getting settled in, the Alouettes came in from a casevac, and it was interesting to see them air-taxi in. Somebody (Van Staden, De Jager) had a buddy from school in one of those choppers.

On Sunday, with everybody very tense, there was suddenly machine gun fire outside the main gate. It stopped soon, but everybody expected more. Only later did we learn that it was Koevoet testing their guns without the courtesy of letting anybody know.

On Sunday we had a briefing by the intelligence officers on what was happening. This became a daily event, during which we would be told who had attacked where, casualties, weapons of enemy. The list of weapons sounded like a 'Jane's Soviet Infantry Anti-Armour Weapons'. RPGs, Strims, pencil-strims, anti-tank rifle grenades. Some insurgents were armed with only an SKS rifle and a dozen anti-tank rifle grenades. It was clear that they had come with the intention of killing armour, and the first two days' Koevoet casualties showed that they succeeded.

Sometime during the week we were given a lecture on 'what Koevoet did wrong'. Our Captain gave it, and he pointed out the reasons why Koevoet were bleeding. Number one was that they had no way of operating dismounted. All their drills were vehicle based, and they did not have the instinct to dismount when the vehicle came under attack. Second was that they had no way of handling large numbers of the enemy. They were used to attacking groups of 10 or so terrs running away. Suddenly they were faced with groups of 30, 50, up to 300, sometimes entrenched. At least once the made the basic error of driving out of their TB on the route that they entered. All this brought to the fore the dislike of the Army commanders for Koevoet.

Many of those captured were very young, 13 to 16. There was some speculation that these were the products of 'breeding camps' set up early in the war, and now considered ready to fight. I saw one of them, locked up in one of the little ammo bunkers around the base. He was very young, dressed in his green uniform. Later I escorted a chef who took food to a prisoner locked in the cells near the main gate.

On the first day that 63 Mech was back in action, they towed back 13 Ratels, broken down. The next morning they drove 9 of them back into battle,

an amazing feat of the tiffies. The Samils were parked in our vehicle park, and I remember all the smashed headlights and twisted accessories, evidence of a rough time in the bush.

For a while we had a burned-out Ratel 90 in our vehicle park. Quite a wreck, with the interior still filled with the twisted and split-open shells of the ammunition casing. I still have a detonation tube from a 90 mm shell, dented, burnt and bent.

The one day we were able to see dust from the *aapkas*, and we could hear, faintly the bangs of a fight south of us. Later we heard the story, how a group of 300 were discovered in their trenches, and how an air-strike was called, but in the 45 minutes it took to get it authorised, the terrs fled to the east and dispersed.

Mopping Up

After a week, on 9 April, the new war was just about over. All that remained was the mopping up. By this time huge numbers of troops were being rushed in. All they could do was to sweep, look for bases set up by PLAN, and capture any stragglers.

The huge numbers of people in the base meant that the coffee-bar was packed every night.

Troops from our company also went out on patrol. There was much tension in the company, because we were by nature base-bound, and while the platoon was made up there was much discussion of who would go and who would stay. They were resupplied three times, once a week. They came back with stories of bushes so dense that you fell into the trenches before you discovered them.

As part of the negotiations, the SADF agreed to return to base for 60 hours, during which time the PLAN fighters were given the opportunity to assemble at given assembly areas. One night an 'air-shout' aircraft flew over the base, circling from west to east, repeating the instructions to whoever could hear.

With the 60-hour base-boundness, we were a huge number of people. As a show of force we held a parade on the first morning, which practically filled the helipad. We also held a sports tournament, which 6 SAI won, much to the pleasure of our Captain.

After these things the implementation of Resolution 435 went on as usual.

Packing up and Signing Over

As the winding down of the base took place, we had a series of parties. The night to remember was when the troops and junior NCOs had their party. The officers and senior NCOs took over the guard, and gave us all the night off. It was, of course, a braai, and the 2-beer limit was not even nodded at. Despite huge alcohol consumption there were no incidents of poor discipline.

Official orders were that there was to be no arson, no destruction.

One could tell that this withdrawal was planned at a high level. We were supplied with enough cardboard boxes, and there was proper strapping material available.

Where all the stores went that we sent away, I don't know.

On an occasion or two I helped to burn official papers. We would dig a hole in the sand at the dump, chuck in the papers, pour diesel over them and set them alight. Once one of the drivers (Cuthbert) used avgas instead, and gave us all a fright.

As a measure to reduce things left behind, we got the order of sleeping at least 6 men per tent.

First to go out of the coffee-bar was all the books, and the Chaplains Services stuff. That meant the organ, the hi-fi, the carpets, and the easy chairs. We were left with plastic chairs and folding tables, and no books.

On the last night, the coffee-bar was empty, except for some dishcloths and cleaning materials and assorted mugs. The few remaining nice mugs I gave away.

SWAPOL took over Eenhana base. It was signed over `as is': basically empty, but with the basic services intact.

Leave and Clearing Out

Our return was by *Wit Olifant*, directly from Eenhana, along roads that were once dangerous, past Ondangwa, south through the roadblock at Miershoop, now abandoned, directly to Grootfontein. We spent a night in Grootfontein, in a transit camp on a sports terrain. The one we had used on the way up was occupied by UNTAG. We had to hand in our ammo, and this was the biggest amount of loose rounds I had seen in my life.

At the airport we had to pack out our kit for a search, and before entering the airport buildings we were scanned with metal detectors. Not very successfully, for I brought back some interesting bits.

Here we emplaned on a 707 that brought us to Port Elizabeth. Here we were fetched by 6 SAI drivers. That night, at the usual mixed-grill welcoming meal, the OC told us that they had decided to give us leave until the date of clearing out. The roof of the hangar lifted as we cheered. One of the reasons for this decision was the parade to be held on Republic Day, on which the unit was to receive the National Ensign. The parade was too soon for us to take part, because the practising for it had already started.

Klaaring out permanently was much the same as *klaaring* out for leave. The only difference was that we took our *trommels* to the main QM store, where we had to open it to show that we had in it:

A sleeping bag
Two overalls
Three blankets
A *varkpan*
A *pikstel*
A cup
A *spoegbakkie*

The only thing I had missing was a *spoegbakkie*, but I knew I had packed in on the border. I found it at home, tucked away in one of my boots!

Our rifles were examined before they were taken in, instead of just stacked in the racks.

All the clearing out took a few days. There was a lot of paperwork to be done, and we each received a nicely printed clearing-out certificate.

On one of these final nights we had a bomb scare! We were turned out of the bungalows, and had to stand around on the paraded ground while the base was searched. It was thought that it was a disgruntled camper, called up to do the parade that organized it.

I was quite heavily loaded after clearing out, for I still had all my books with me, and had acquired some extra stuff, for example some co-axial cable that I had rescued from an Eenhana rubbish bin, that turned out useful at home.

On the last day we had a final parade, with the OC himself attending.

At the short notice it was not possible to find bus transport for us who declined the expense of flying to the Transvaal, so we got booked on a train, my first experience. It was fun and relaxing. As the train pulled into the station, a pencil flare went up. Once we were out of the base, quite a number of troops removed their 6 SAI flashes and instead put on 54 flashes that they had bought at Eenhana. We traveled through the night, and arrived at Johannesburg station early in the morning.

As a final goodbye, we passed a train loaded with Buffels on a siding near Lyttleton. Clearly visible, in the middle of each bin was the 54 Battalion insignia.

Pro Patria

At clearing out I was assigned Regiment Pretorius as my CF unit. During 1990 I was called up to do a short camp, and I asked for delay, because of my academic commitments. During this camp a parade was held, at which I would have received the [Pro Patria] medal, but instead it came by post.

Transition To SANDF and Abolition Of Conscription

How did you learn of any/the change in your military obligations when conscription was abolished?

During my time at University I did three camps, one with Regiment Pretorius, the others with the University of Pretoria Military Unit. A one point there was a greater need for people in the Commandos, so I was transferred to Bronkhorstspruit Commando where my official address was. It was a paper transfer only, and soon after I got a letter from the Commando, informing me that I was no longer obliged to do any service, but would I mind volunteering?

What factors influenced your decision about whether to continue to serve voluntarily, or whether to end your association with the new SANDF?

I've never really made a decision. I often think of becoming active again, but as the army will never be a career for me, it always comes second. Maybe one day, when I have a settled life ...

Chapter Seventeen

Army Cook
Len Carter
3 SA Infantry, Potchefstroom 1988 - 1989
Okahandja, Windhoek

Len Carter reported to 3 SAI Potchefstroom in 1988. After basics he was trained as a chef at Okahandja and served at Windhoek, and he was there when UNTAG arrived. After that he completed his national service at 5 SAI in Ladysmith.

BASICS

We started in February. I did three months in Potchefstroom which was basic training. That was constant `hurry up and wait'. We were all together in a big group and there was always the buzz of `What's going to happen now? Are we going to get an *`oppie'* [punishment PT] or are we going somewhere?' The whole army thing was so new. We also used to sit around and chat so I can't say that I was ever bored during basics.

We always had things to do during basics, we were constantly on the go. At 3 SAI, out of the whole battalion, there were five companies. One was Charlie company, which had six platoons. Alpha company were the guys who were going off to Oudtshoorn to do JLs and they left eventually. Bravo company was all the light duties, and G3K3s, Charlie was the chefs, Delta was the dog squad, Echo was the infantry, and I can't remember what Foxtrot was but they were eventually posted out to another camp, so we were eventually left with just the four companies; Bravo, Charlie, Delta and Echo. Echo, the infantry company, felt that they were the la-di-dah's, and that the chefs were just beneath them.

On our company we had five platoons of chefs and one platoon that was infantry, and they also thought that they were snooty, but that platoon was actually at the bottom of the rung, and their infantry corporal was reasonable, but he was English, so the Staff hated him. Our Staff Sergeant always used to walk around with a long face because he had the chefs and every time we went up to the `Griffin', which was their club, he would get raked about this because he had the chefs. He was this pint sized guy with this huge voice. At the end we won the best platoon in the best company award.

My platoon had Corporal Shutte who was an incredible chap. He believed in discipline, but he also believed in esprit de corps and getting the chaps to work with you, and so he did a good job; if we carried our end, he was happy and he carried his end, and he would look after us, and our Lieutenant was a two pip camper who was some sort of professional man, very quietly spoken, a very gentle man with a lot of integrity - a very nice guy. He impressed me because, on the night that we arrived, and we arrived late at night and we were

put into his platoon. He marched us there and he had this huge big green rain coat on, and he had this radio and he had his beret and he looked like one of these tough marine-type chaps that you expect to go shooting. He walked into our bungalow and he called us all and he started opening the windows and he said; `Right! You are human beings. You need air to live, so you will sleep with your windows open.' I loved it. I thought this is basics, this is army! Looking at the basic human needs - we need air. I loved it. I thought `This chap's a real army guy.' He was such a nice chap. He would push us hard, and he would discipline us, and he would make sure that we were up to standard, but at the same time he would carry his end too, and he wouldn't mistreat us, and if we did well, he would say; `That was good!' Not only did Charlie Company finish as the best company, but our platoon - platoon number four - we actually finished as best platoon in the company and the one chap from our platoon was the best in the battalion as far as inspections was concerned.

We finished on a very high note, and we were very chuffed with ourselves, but it was really due to the corporal and the Lieutenant because they made sure that we were up to standard with discipline, but at the same time they built esprit de corps. We could really look up to and respect them. One chap was a permanent force corporal. Our corporal was also a national serviceman, but this other was a permanent force corporal who had been in the army for yonks. He admitted himself that he was actually too dumb to get anywhere, and that was why he was still a corporal. He often used to make jokes about it. He would say; `I reach for a pen and I knock over my coke.' He would crumple a piece of paper and try and throw it in the bin and it would go out of the door. He was actually quite a vicious chap. I remember at one stage his platoon were actually beating everybody else in inspections. You could walk past their dormitory and the floor would actually look like glass - the floor would really look like a sea of glass.

One weekend while we were all busy washing our clothes and mellowing out, these guys were scrubbing it with steel wool to get all the black marks off the floors, and polishing them, and they had strips of blanket, and no-one was allowed to walk with their boots on the floor. They would have to step on to these bits of blankets [called `taxis'] and shuffle to their bed, and these guys were really doing well, but one time - when their inspection was perfect - the corporal pushed them too far. He said; `This inspection is *sif*!' [septic] which it was not, and he grabbed fire buckets full of soil, not the beach sand, he got soil, wet it, and he threw mud on to their floor, onto their beds, onto their *trommels* [trunks] and he also threw it up on to the roof, and you can't get those stains out, so he actually totally destroyed their bungalow. After that, the guys just lost motivation. They didn't keep it up. They now had to clean it and try and bring it back to standard and they couldn't get the stains off the roof. The floor was scratched again from all the soil. The guys actually lost motivation. From then on the platoon just went downhill. He broke their spirit. He broke any sense of morale they had. He totally lost it. He was a corporal, and he had been there for years. He didn't expect to make sergeant himself. I think that I recently heard that he made sergeant. He never expected to get to any higher rank. He never expected to be a staff sergeant of a company. He always knew that he would be in a support role, because he just didn't have the ability to make it, so he was totally unmotivated. What he did

to his chaps was cruel. Those guys really gave their best and they were becoming the best platoon in the company and he just broke their morale totally, and they just went downhill from then on. They actually finished as the worst platoon in the company.

There was another chap, an Afrikaans NDP, who was also incredibly cruel. I remember what he did to Sean, Llewellen's friend. He made the guy run and fall down, run and fall down over rocks as part of an *`oppie'*. Eventually Sean's overalls were ripped to shreds and his knees were bleeding and his elbows were bleeding. Eventually he just fell down and said; `I can't do any more,' and the corporal said *`Kan jy nie?'* [Can't you?] and grabbed his whole harness and was pulling his head back, and Sean was in agony. The guy was almost breaking his back, pulling his whole helmet back. Sean eventually broke down and started crying, and the Staff Sergeant walked along. The corporal said; *`Ja, Staff, die ou kan nie meer nie, maar ons gaan hom wys, ne, staff?'* [Yes, staff, this guy can do no more, but we'll show him, hey?] The Staff looked at the corporal and said; *`Nee, ons gaan nie. Laat hom gaan,'* [No we will not. Let him go] and he told the guy to go. I remember at one time all the corporals from the company actually got an *`oppie'* from the Staff because of their behaviour. You did get the cruel chaps, you did get the guys who had no ambition whatsoever and wouldn't get anywhere. Their lot in life was to make their salary by also to make other people's lives a misery. They were the guys who pulled the army down. There were some good leaders; our staff pushed us hard and we almost felt that he hated us, and we hated him and he would make us do oppies endless times, but at the end when we graduated, I still remember, everybody had a lump in their throat when we finished.

At the end when we had had the parade and been declared as the winning company, just before we were going to be marched off to go and enjoy ourselves with our parents and that he said; *`Manne, baie goed. Ek is trots op jou!'* [Well done, men. I am proud of you.] We all had lumps in our throats, and when we marched up to our parents we marched like we had never marched before. We finished with a good note, and we could see that he was a genuine chap. You did have the bad guys who were *vrot!* [rotten] They are the exception rather than the rule, I suppose. I had a lot off respect for most of the rank in the army. For my staff sergeant, for my corporal, for my Lieutenant, for the captain of our company, Captain Oberholtzer, an incredible chap. I had respect for all of them in basics.

There were six platoons in the company, and our turn had come around and we were standing the guard duty. I was actually in hospital at the time, but I heard the story. There was the 2IC and the 1IC on duty at the guard room, and there were these two chaps on duty at the transport depot. One chap's name was Llewellen and the other chap was Sean. These chaps were great mates. Llewelyn had these huge buck-teeth and he was a little bit slow. He was a nice chap but he was always making mess-ups and getting into trouble - he was quite a character. Sean was okay. Llewelyn was running along during one of the training things and he fell into the ground with his rifle and he didn't clean his rifle before the next day's inspection. So the corporal was going along, and checking down the guys' barrels and going `Waah! This thing's dirty, man! You didn't clean it properly,' and he makes the guy run, and he checks the next one; `This one's all right, but there is still dust.' He gets to

Llewelyn's rifle; `I can't see anything. I still can't see anything.' In the nozzle - the silencer, [flash-hider] there was a huge plug of dirt. He *jaaged* [chased] him until tea time. Another time on the shooting range, we were shooting standing up and all the chaps were firing away. Now Llewelyn's gun jams, so he was trying to get his jam to come about, and he couldn't succeed, so he swings around. The Staff sergeant shouts `Stop! Stop.' I've never seen the staff sergeant so cross. He smacked him on the side of the helmet and said; `You're never to do that again.' Llewelyn then had an ammo box on his shoulders and off he went. Sean and Llewelyn were on guard duty at the transport depot. The idea was that there would be two guards at the transport deport. The one had to be in the tower and one had to patrol the perimeter. Sean was in the tower and Llewelyn was patrolling the perimeter. The chap on the perimeter is the one who has the full magazine of live bullets, and the chap in the tower has the radio. Llewelyn was walking around and half way through the guard duty they were going to switch around, so Sean climbs down the steel ladder in the concrete pipe from the tower and Llewelyn climbs up. Llewelyn didn't give Sean the magazine of live bullets, so he shouts up; `Llewelyn, throw down the magazine.' so Llewelyn throws it down. Sean catches it, but he thinks he hears something `clink', so he is convinced that something is missing. So he takes the bullets out and he counts them. There are supposed to be thirty and there's twenty nine, so there's one missing and they have to account for every single bullet. So Sean is in a panic because he knows that he is going to get into trouble for this. There was this high high grass all around the tower, so Sean starts parting the grass trying to find this bullet. Eventually he is pulling up all the grass, and by the time the guard duty had come to an end he had pulled out all the grass around the tower, but he finally found the bullet. Then the time came that Darren, the 1IC radioed to them to come in, saying `Were sending out the other chaps who will meet you half way.' Llewelyn left the radio on and starts climbing down the stairs, and Darren says he was sitting there with the radio on the table and all he hears is the `Dang dang dang dang!' Then they heard Sean's voice on the radio; `Darren, Darren, quick! Llewelyn's fallen down the tower!' Apparently he only had some bruises and sprains and that sort of thing.

This story was the cherry on the top of basics. Something that touched me. In the platoon we had such esprit de corps. When the evaluation of our basics came to an end, you are supposed to be able to do so many push-ups, so many sit-ups and so many pull-ups. I couldn't even manage one pull-up. I was still very heavy, and I couldn't even do one pull-up. The chaps in my platoon all did their twelve, and they did one more saying `And one for Jimmy!'. I had the nickname `Jimmy' because my surname is Carter. That really touched me. All these guys did one for me, and the corporal counted, and passed me, so I didn't have to do basics again. That really touched me. Not only your personal experience is positive, but you learn to work together as a team, and you finish as really good friends. There was incredible team spirit. It was great. I still remember on our *klaaring* out day - *klaaring* out of basics, he was walking around with his chest sticking far out, and he was walking along next to this staff sergeant who was a huge seven foot chap, with a barrel chest who had Delta Company, and he said *`Ah, dis my chefs daai!'* [Those are My chefs!] He was quite chuffed about winning.

BEING POSTED AFTER BASICS

My friends and I were being held up with some sort of questioning and everybody else was standing in their lines and they were being allocated to the various parts of the country. Everybody was choosing the parts of the country that they wanted to go to. We were itching because we wanted to get Natal Command, but we missed it. That was taken up straight away by all the surfing boys, so when we finally got through and joined the lines there were only a couple of really outward places left, and we said `No ways are we taking these places' and we heard a rumour that there were still three positions open for Natal Command so we were going to stick out for these. All the South African positions were taken.

We were standing there, and they asked `Okay guys, exactly where do you want to go?' We said; `We want to go to Natal Command.' They said; `No, that place is taken. All that's left now is Grootfontein and Walvis Bay.' So we thought `Oh, great! Grootfontein is up on the border.' I said; `Chaps, that's okay, but I believe that Walvis Bay is nice because there's lots of sand dunes to run up, and you can play in the sea.' So we said; `We'll go to Walvis Bay.'

OKAHANDJA

So we got sent on route, and at Windhoek we got stopped. We were going up to the HQ and one of the corporals in the kitchen spotted us and said `Oh, no no, I want these chaps here.' So he went running off, and organised that we would stay in Windhoek, and took us to a place about 50 ks away to Okahandja, to go and do our Chef's training there. We had this huge big loud speaker in the camp, and they used to play the reveille in at half past five every morning. There were houses across the road who would hear this every morning at the same time. I don't know why they didn't complain, because we thought; `If I was a civilian living in a house, to hear that at half past five every morning would drive us quite potty.'

The camp was on the outskirts of the town, so there were suburbs right next to it, which was quite amazing. The training was with the South West Africa Territorial Force. That was fun because that was a totally different way of doing things, a totally different culture. It had a different flavour to it - you can't actually put your finger on it. It was definitely more relaxed. I think a lot of the chaps were permanent force guys, but not with the Permanent Force attitude. In South Africa there was always friction between the national servicemen and the permanent force. In South West Africa they were professional soldiers who were quite relaxed about it. I think that quite a few were just doing it for the job. Even the professional chaps who enjoyed soldiering, they were interested in doing soldiering and getting on with the job, and if you stepped majorly out of line they would correct you but otherwise it was pretty much `just keep going, chaps!' It was very nice. I actually had a lot of respect for those guys.

The whole base at Okahandja was a training base for the different sections. The signallers had their own section, the medics had their section. We had our own kitchen set up, and two field kitchens, so we had to learn all the basics of spices and baking and cooking. We spent a lot of time just messing around, because there's only so much that you can teach. The

corporal didn't go into much depth; we had a whole lot of eggs donated. We had piles of eggs, so we used to make the medics omelettes in the mornings. There was this really nice medic Lieutenant, a lady, and she used to come for omelette's every morning. It was a lot of messing around. Our corporal was a really good chap. We actually went off for a weekend with him and our Lieutenant to Swakopmund. There were only seven or eight of us. That was the grand total of the chefs, plus about another four chaps from the SWA Territory Force. The eight of us went away for with the Lieutenant and the corporal for the weekend, and the other chaps went home. It was quite festive.

There were twelve of us, so it was a small group, and we were all good friends, and we spent a lot of the days messing around, and baking piles of food and giving it to the others sections, so everybody was friends with us. The signallers loved us. Even when we started working in the kitchens, you make good friends with the regimental police and with the store keepers because then you can get anything you want. They don't give you trouble with pass either. If you haven't got your putties on, that's okay. Go through. The Chef's Course lasted about six weeks.

About twenty k's away from Okahandja there was some sort of camp. I can't remember clearly what it was, and about five k's outside of it was an ammunition dump. We were on course at the time and for some reason most of the camp had gone on leave, and the whole camp about twenty k's away had also gone on leave, so they wanted to use some of us to guard their camp, so we were packed off there for just one night. We were put on to a roster and there were about three chaps guarding the main camp, and three were sent out to the ammunition dump. I was on guard duty with two other chaps out at the ammunition dump, and we were strictly forbidden to have fires - obviously with it being an ammunition dump. We were very cold so we decided to risk it. One guy would be on duty while the other two warmed themselves, and if they saw the lights of the sergeant major's bakkie we would have to quickly shuffle the fire out It was quite ironic - we were supposed to be guarding the ammunition dump, and the guys with me John and Phil actually broke into the ammunition dump and were raiding it. I was in a difficult situation, saying; `Chaps, you shouldn't be doing this, you know. This is not quite what we should be doing. We should be guarding the dump, not breaking into it.' They had these semi-circular corrugated iron buildings, and all the stuff was in there, and John was into the one, and into the other, and coming out with arm loads full of stuff; thunder flashes and smoke grenades and all sorts of things, and flares - the whole tuti! John was just the kind of guy who just liked to have that stuff. He did actually use a couple - apparently one Guy Fauwkes he shot off a couple of flares and a thunder-flash one time. The smoke grenades he just kept. I don't think he had a particular use for them; it was just a fun thing to do. John was a bit of a rebel; he had to do things to prove himself.

Most chaps just like to have that sort of stuff; its like going to collect cartridges from the shooting range. What are you going to do with empty cartridges? But you polish them - you just like having the stuff. I remember John running backwards and forwards - just checking the shadows - running along with armloads of the stuff, and me running along to check on whether the sergeant major was coming.

I didn't see this myself, but this is what I heard. The Australians thought that they were going to land in battle conditions, and they had heard that all the bridges from the airport to Windhoek, which is about 30 k's, had been blown out, so they packed their plane full of bridge building equipment, because they expected that they would actually have to fight their way into Windhoek and build bridges on the way. So their plane lands with the chaps and all their bridge building equipment, and the back thing drops down and all these guys run out, surround the plane, with their guns set to rapid; full battle-kit, everything. Cammo cream, the whole lot; they've surrounded the plane and they're ready for a battle. And there's the major with his gold chain and all the delegates standing around waiting to welcome the Australian contingent. And these guys were ready for a full scale battle. They really expected to have to fight their way in to Windhoek. They drove in with a dazed look.

The Peruvians arrived late at night; about half past eleven at night, and I was on night duty in the kitchen, and I heard that these chaps had arrived, so I thought; `Let me make them some tea and cookies,' so I laid all these cookies nicely on to a plate and made them a big pot of tea. I just used to wear shorts and a T-shirt on night duty, and I had this huge big butchers apron, that came right down to my ankles, so I was wearing shorts, T-shirt and my apron on, and I took this huge tray of tea and cookies and I walked through to the officers' lounge which was where these chaps were. True as Bob! these chaps were on the floor. They had broken open an ammo crate, there was ammo around all over the place, and they were dishing out these bullets to each other, and they had their hand guns out and they were busy loading up magazines. I thought' `What's going on here?'

Apparently, they had heard the story that there were terrorists all around the camp, watching them and ready to snipe at anything that moved. Picture these chaps rushing off to bed, huddled against the wall with their weapons cocked, waiting for a sniper to take a pot shot at them, and Len comes trundling through in his huge apron with a big plate of tea and cookies. I got some surprised looks from them. It was so dramatic; these battled hardened chaps, with serious looks on their faces loading magazines, and I walk in with my tea and cookies. It was quite amazing, the impressions that they were under.

I should have sat down and had a chat with some of the chaps and asked them; `Exactly what do you think of the political situation? Who is the enemy?' They were staying at a SWATF base, which of course had SADF personnel too, so I don't think that they saw the SADF as the enemy, but I think that they realised that SWAPO or the guerrillas or someone were attacking the bases, or sniping at the bases or something. The Australians too - if they had been expecting a battle situation, I wonder who they expected they would be fighting against? Were they just going to plough into Windhoek building bridges and shooting at everything that moved? They referred very elusively to `these terrorists', whereas I think they worked more with the SWATF and SADF than they worked with chaps from SWAPO and the rest, but there was always this elusive `third force' called `the terrorists' who were the bad guys, and that's who they expected to fight. It was strange; these

battled hardened veterans who had seen action all over the world, and they still had impressions in their mind of what they expected.

When the Canadians first arrived, we were cooking for them in the Officers' mess. To them, this just wasn't on. We tried our best for them; we gave them steaks and chips and jelly and chocolate pudding, but to them, this just wasn't on! Apparently in their messes overseas they were used to ala carte menus, and they could order what they wanted, and there was a pudding table of about thirteen different puddings, and they expected the same. They actually hired Fedics [a catering company] to take over the catering, so we were actually barred from that whole section. I remember one morning, when Fedics first started, they used to bring the food in in hot boxes and then lay it out, and I peeked in to the main area where the dishing out was done, and I got a really snooty look from the chef. To be honest, the food looked exactly the same as ours, but if the food is done by an outside catering company, and because they set the tables out nicely - they had these big horn-baskets with rolls tumbling out, and all the packed butters and cheeses and chocolates and fruit. That was what they were after. It was just amazing to hear that this was what the Canadian chaps expected.

There were the Australian chaps with their portable potties and their bridge building equipment and their ration packs expecting to fight, and the Canadian's come along and they want their thirteen different types of desserts. It was quite amazing.

We had a big Cape Coloured corporal with a big beer *boep* [belly], and he used to call me `Tubby'. This guy was humungous. He couldn't get any browns so he had to wear overalls. His apron was a black plastic rubbish bag - he would cut holes into it so he could put his arms out, and it would cover him. He only had one set of overalls, and he never washed them. He would go on duty and get bits of fat all over him, and he just wouldn't wash them, so he constantly smelled of rancid fat and all sorts of things. The guy drank himself silly, and he had a room in one of the bungalows - a separate room of his own - and one time we went in there; it was just his bed. No light; just a candle, and bottles strewn all over the place. He never made his bed, and he would get drunk out of his mind and fall asleep in his overalls, and then he would go into the kitchen and work in his overalls again. I would joke with the guys; I would say; `When I look at tubby, I actually get the desire to do push-ups because I realised that I also have quite a tyre, and whenever I looked at this guy I wanted to lose weight. It was quite a good joke; every time Tubby came into the room, one of the guys would say; `Hey, Jimmy, push-ups!' Tubby never knew what was going on.

[Were you being supervised?] You would think so, but SWA was a different story. The locals didn't have a permanent force - they had permanent men, but they weren't considered `Permanent Force'. They had their national servicemen who would come for their two years, but then they would have their other chaps - their long-timers, but it was like extra duty. They weren't actually considered `Permanent Force'. Those guys were fine. They had no problem. They used to live at home, or they had some sort of plan. They always had clean clothes, and they had fair standards of hygiene.

There was this one corporal who was also a Cape Coloured with an incredibly wrinkled face. His jaw stuck out and his lips were pursed, so he

looked just like a cartoon character just out of a Giles magazine, and every afternoon at about half past four - this was Corporal Hendrik, the two-liner, and he used to say *`Maak skoon. Maak skoon!'* [Clean up] Corporal Blaau, this cartoon character was a one-stripe, and he would go rushing into the store room, get hold of a big 5 litre can of soap which was always green, and he would walk out of the store room shaking it - you always had to shake it - and he would pour some of it into a bucket, get hot water out of the boilers and he would start throwing soapy water all over the floor, which really ticked us off because we were trying to get the guards' food out, so we were rushing about with hot-boxes and now the floor is covered with hot soapy water, which was very slippery. It's another story all the accidents that we had. This guy would then get a hard-bristle broom and start scrubbing the floors, and he would be telling us to get squeegees and pulling rank, and we were running around trying to get the guards food. What we did to him; we got hold of one of these 5 litre cans and we poured just into the top of it a whole lot of bleach, because we had discovered that when bleach and the green soap mixed, it turned the soap blue. We just poured some in to the top and we closed it. The next day, eventually half past four comes along, and the corporal is going; *`Maak skoon. Maak skoon!'* Corporal Blaau goes running into the store room, grabs this 5 l can, and comes out walking, and swinging. We were all watching, and the next minute he looks down and says; *`Wat gaan hier aan?'* [What's going on here?] because the whole thing had gone blue. That was quite funny. You had to be there! The cabbage - this was Corporal Hendrik - this was also trying to get the guards food out, because they eat earlier than everybody else. Basically Corporal Hendrik got us to chop up some cabbage and put it into one of these big tilting pans, and he really did a good job on it - he really wanted to give these guys a big vegetable, so he had put margarine in, and he had put spices and herbs, and he had sorte'd it gently, and stirred it nicely, and it had come out nice and brown with all the spices and it smelt delicious. So he called me, he said*`Tubby, gooi uit.'* - meaning `Take it out and put it into pans and go and put it out for the guards.' He says; *`Tubby, gooi uit.'* (`Dish it up' and `put it out'!) I didn't have many Afrikaans skills. I had done it at school, but that was all theory Afrikaans. Now I was learning the practical sides of Afrikaans. When he said *`Gooi uit'*, I naturally thought he meant `Throw it away.' So I threw this whole lot of sorte'd cabbage into the bin.

Lo and behold! about four o'clock-ish, the guards come rushing in for their food and they line up and Corporal Hendrik was supervising the dishing up, and the guys got their potatoes, they got their meat, and along comes the time for vegetables, and Corporal Hendrik is scratching his head. *`Tubby, waar is die koel?'* [Tubby, where is the cabbage?] *`Ek het dit uitgegooi.'* [I threw it out - meaning put it ouk - meaning served it] *`Ja, ek weet, maar waar is die koel?'* [Yes, I know, but where is the cabbage?] All his prized cabbage was in the bin. He actually had quite a good sense of humour, so he just started laughing. I don't think I ever remember him telling me to *`gooi dit uit'* again; from then on he would say; *`Skep dit uit, tubby.'* [Serve it up, tubby.]

We used to have bleach in black plastic bottles, and we had Worcestershire sauce in clear plastic bottles but it was a black liquid. We had this one chap - I don't know whether he would tell the difference, but he walked into the store and grabbed two black bottles and poured them into the

beef stew, which was a 200 litre boiler. The Corporal Hendrik comes along and says; *`Wat het jy nou met hierdie een gemaak?'* [What have you done with this one?] and he's holding this plastic bottle. `I threw it in the stew.' The corporal said; `That wasn't Worcestershire sauce. That was bleach.' He looked around, tasted it, and said *`Gooi uit.'*, meaning `Dish out!' He would never have thrown away 200 litres of beef stew. There was no way that Corporal Hendrik would have done that. The guys all ate stew with two bottles of bleach in it. There were no complaints.

When we first arrived, there were eight of us, and we were put into a military bungalow that had actually been condemned, and it was going to be torn down, but we were put into this place, so we didn't actually have a working toilet or a working bath. All we had were four beds with mattresses on, and their were eight of us. We just doubled up - one chap would be on night duty, so whoever he shared a bed with would get a good night's sleep that night, but the rest of us had to double up in the beds.

Now the chap I shared with was a chap called Rowan, and he drooled in his sleep, so up until about five o'clock in the morning - we each slept down one side and we slept cramped up. The great joy was when he was on morning shift, and he had to get up at five and go to the kitchen to work, because then from five to seven I could stretch out in the bed and sleep properly, but he used to drool right into the mattress, so I would roll over into a wet patch. That was quite a `fond' memory, looking back, but it wasn't fun at the time.

Evening on night duty - many of the chaps in the SWATF didn't want to be on night duty because they all had family, and they were all on day shift, and they put us white chaps from the SADF on to night duty. We were such a close bunch that whoever was on night duty - everybody else would go and join him in the kitchen, and we would have a big party in the kitchen together, sometimes until midnight, and just play around. And then everyone would go off to sleep and you would just do your night duty. I have some incredible memories of these parties that we used to have. You would start your night duty at about seven o'clock, and at about eight o'clock there was a knock on the door, and there were the chaps. There were about eight or ten of us, because there were another two SADF guys that we got friendly with who were there before us, so there were about ten of us, and we were a really festive band.

John, the chap who stole all the stuff from the ammo store, he had a motorbike and on one of his day duties, the key box was open and he grabbed the whole bunch of keys to all the stores and fridges in the whole place hopped on to his motorbike, shot into town, got a locksmith to quickly cut him keys and he shot back before anybody missed him or the keys, and so we had this huge bunch of keys for everything, not only our daily issue of stores and fridges, but to the long term storage fridges and everything. There was bulk stuff stored for months and months, and of course everybody was robbing the place blind anyway.

There would be times on night duty when one of the staffs would arrive, and he would come rushing into the kitchen and open up the main freezer, carry out about three boxes of T-bone streak saying `There's a function going on somewhere and were just taking these T-bones along to cook.' You would know that it was a farce because if there was a big function going on, the

biggest kitchen in the whole city was Suiderhof - we were the biggest and virtually the only army kitchen around. All of the others were smaller Mickey-Mouse places, just catering for their small personnel, so if there was any function taking place in Windhoek, the catering took place at Suiderhof, and we would have heard about it - we would have cooked starches, we would have cooked vegetables, we would have cooked puddings. There would have been chaps going backwards and forwards, so when the staff comes rushing in at half past ten at night, grabs three boxes of T-bone steaks, and says; `There's some function going on,' you would know that he had a party up his sleeve. He was either selling the stuff or he was having a party with all of his buddies - having a braai and he wanted to come and get some more meat. They were robbing the place blind. We just wanted to enjoy our stay up there. I had many offers where I could have got hold of boxes of meat and sold them, but I just said; `No, forget it.' I didn't think that was nice.

We felt that, as chefs, and being out there, far away from home, that it would be all right for us to look after ourselves, but not make a profit!, so we would open up the fridges and open up huge big rolls of cheese, and we'd cut ourselves cheese, and we would use the deep fryer to cook ourselves whatever we wanted, from chips to fried fish. We would grab a huge chunk of frozen meat, cut steaks from it, put it through the tenderiser, and cook ourselves a whole pile of tenderised steak with tartar sauce. We had all this stuff late at night, so we used to have these fantastic parties. We used to get dried mangoes and dried pineapple and flavoured milks, and it was absolute feast time, the whole way through. We constantly had all the other chaps on guard duty, constantly coming and banging on the kitchen window wanting to get in as well.

Once there was a whole row of onions that I had to cut, and I was in absolute tears, and this chap comes up to the window and says; `Ag, please get me some food.' So I said, `Okay, wait here. I'll go and get you some rolls, and when I got back to him, he was also in tears.'

We had keys to the function store rooms; there were shrimps, mussels and all sorts there. John was determined to have a good standard of living while we were there. It was really probably the best year of my life in the army, and an incredible memory because we had such partnership. There were chaps from South Africa up there, and we were all in the same job.

The reason that John was so rebellious - maybe he felt that he wanted to get his own back on the army or whatever - was that he and three other chaps had been on officers course at Oudtshoorn and they were going to be infantry officers, and they had done the course well, but the one chap, Phil, had twisted his ankle a few weeks before, and then Robin and John were asked to leave the course for no valid reason. They weren't given any reason. They had done nothing wrong. They had passed everything that they had to, and they had maintained a good standard of discipline, and they were given no valid reason for why they were asked to leave the course. John was really tough - he saw himself as the infantry type - leading chaps into battle, and then he was told that he was being sent far away from home - not even close to home, he was getting sent to SWA. He said; `Right, fine!' And then they told him that he was going to be a chef, and that cracked him up, because he saw himself as an infantry chap. He phoned home, and he actually burst into tears on the phone.

He said; `They're making me a chef!' John got a bit hardened against the army because of that - he had actually given his best - he had wanted to excel, become an officer and lead men, and they had done this to him. He didn't have a *saak* [`case', meaning `interest'] after that. He said; `I'm just going to make the best out of my national service. I'll do the job I have to do. I won't steal, but I will make myself comfortable.' We were all behind old John.

We were also supposed to be confined to our base. John got hold of a whole lot of those plastic sleeves that you iron down, and a whole lot of pass cards, and he wrote all our names out and write that we were staying in the officers quarters across town, so we had gate passes to go in and out. So we all had one of these plastic cards. I was in the youth group at the church down the road, so ethically I didn't feel that I could use them. I would just walk out to the gate, wave at one of the RPs and say; *`Ek gaan uit.'* [I'm going out] and the guy would let me through. I never had a problem. I could always get out to church and things like that. I supposed that I could go right back to - I was not supposed to - I shouldn't have. John had his card, and all the other chaps had their cards, and off they went. John was pretty young. I think he had done a little bit of mechanics or something out of school. I was eighteen at the time, and most of the chaps were about eighteen, but John and Phil were about twenty or twenty one.

I think that John was an amazing chap - he was such a rebel on his big motorbike, and making himself comfortable and that - but he was such a good friend. He kept us together - he lived for all of us, and even after we had finished with the army, it was John that kept in contact. None of us contacted each other but John was the one who would phone everybody and tell everybody each other's news. John was really a good friend, and incredible character.

We were the last ones to leave the base. Most of the guys had shipped out. I think the SWATF was being disbanded, so all those chaps had gone. There was a skeleton staff in the kitchen, and virtually all the SADF chaps had pulled out, the intelligence, the counter-intelligence - all those guys had pulled out, and there were only a couple of us chefs left. We actually had to catch the last bus out of town. The bus took us all the way up to Grootfontein where we were supposed to catch a plane, and we missed the plane or something - `The Last Plane Out' - but we got another one - another Flossie, and off we went - landed in Pretoria. That was an experience. Going home on pass we had flown on those big Jumbo jets with jet engines, and here was the high-pitched whine, and off you go.

In a Flossie you look out of the window and there's a propeller whirring. the thing's going down the runway - whurrr! - and you're getting near the end of the runway - and the pilot pulls back the joystick, and you find yourself climbing up. You're used to these jet engines and you just swoop up. In a Flossie you can feel it pulling itself up. It’s when you turn to the side you realise that this is what's pulling you along - its quite frightening. It was okay when you got used to it - I was just used to seeing this nice case which I knew was a jet engine. When you see the propeller spinning, and at times when you looked at it, it looked as though it was turning slowly - in the opposite direction. I remember that there were the barest of necessities in the aircraft.

There wasn't any padding or anything; you could see the wires. When the pilot adjusted the ailerons you would see some cable moving.

WINDHOEK

Then when I went to Windhoek I was with this incredible group of chaps; we loved each other's company and we were always doing things. We were always finding things to do. When we were on the course at Okahandja we were finding ways on weekends to get back to Windhoek and walk around. There were times of sitting around camp, but we were always doing something, and making a plan. On chefs course we used to practise baking, and we would bake and we would bake and we would bake, and we had all these lovely delicacies and we would go around with these huge boxes distributing them to the other guys in the camp. They brought in huge boxes and cartons of eggs, far more than we needed. I think they expected about fifty guys on the course and there were only eleven of us, so we had all these boxes of eggs that we didn't know what to use for. In the morning we would cook up omelettes for ourselves. We didn't bother going in to breakfast; we would cook up nice cheese omelettes for ourselves, and all these lovely Lieutenant ladies from the medics would come over and we would make omelettes for them. We became really good friends with the corporal and the Lieutenant and then over the weekends, when everybody was going on pass, it wasn't really worth while us going, so we said that we would go to Swakopmund and the corporal and the Lieutenant took us to Swakop and we had a wonderful weekend messing about there, walking around in jeans, body surfing, and going to the arcades.

Back in Windhoek, between our late night parties on night duty and during the day on our off times we were going in to Windhoek to either play arcade games or go shopping or we would go to the movies, and we got to know a couple of people. Also with my church activities, we got to know a whole group of girls whom we used to go and visit, and sometimes over weekends the folks would invite us out for braais, so we would all go out there for braais and that.

In Windhoek it was almost like a civvy job. There was no army involved, and we always used to be able to get out of shooting and drilling and parades and shooting and all the rest, so it was just like working as a civilian chef on duty. We even forgot about discipline because when you are carrying a tray of food you don't bother to salute or *strek* [brace]. As far as the army was concerned, the only thing that showed that we were in the army was our uniforms. The rest was like a civilian job, and even though you call the corporal `Corporal', he was more like your boss. We had no boredom up in Windhoek.

I remember when all the guys went back to South Africa, our Lieutenants left their webbing behind, so I had three full sets of webbing, plus a whole lot of dixies and other things that I found in the kitchen that guys had left behind. I carried all this stuff with me on the Flossie back home, and my Mom knew when I walked in the door, and she said; `What did you have on the plane that was wrong? I was praying for you, and I felt that something was wrong.' I said; `Ach, mom, don't be silly.' I kept this stuff, and after coming home from

church one night I actually felt terrible about the stuff because I realised that even though they had left it behind, and even though they are not using canvass webbing any more, it was still their property, so I laid all that stuff in a huge back pack, put it on my back, on my bicycle, cycling through town to the Natal Carbineers, dumped all the stuff on the table, and said very loudly; `Here. I'm returning all this stuff. I actually shouldn't have had it, but here it is, you can have it all back.' The guy looked at it; `Ach, canvas. They'll probably burn it!' I loved that canvas stuff. It's brilliant. You can use it for all sorts of things; camping. You can distinctly tell the difference between the canvas stuff and the new nylon. They had all those worries of the guys passing themselves off as soldiers. I didn't see why they had to destroy it. They could have made a lovely profit. I believe that you can buy them through army surplus stores now.

5 SAI AT LADYSMITH

Editors Note: Len Carter says that when he was posted to 5 SAI he slept through at that station and only woke up when they reached Pietermaritzburg. He phoned them, to explain what had happened, and they seemed understanding and authorised him to travel back to 5 SAI. When he had arrived there, they did not seem to have expected him, and did not have a place for him to stay, so he lodged with a catering corporal and his wife.

I was sent down to Ladysmith. They hammered the *Ou Manne* there. Then I was suddenly brought back into discipline. We had three months to go before we klaared out, and they were having full scale inspections and things like that. Floors were expected to be like glass. We got the shock of our lives, because instead of having to practise for a normal pass out parade, which is just a little bit of extra drill, and that's it, at the end of the year, our colonel was handing over to another colonel, and there was this huge bug elaborate parade that is supposed to be done for a handing over. When one guy hands over to another there is an incredibly elaborate parade. They said; `The *roofies* can't do it because they've got duties.' That was also fun though. We had to do duties for the RSM, so we were no longer in our sections, so we would be sent off to go and throw blocks of concrete onto trucks and off load them at the dump, and go here and dig a big pit, and go here and go there, so we had a wonderful time, ou manne sitting on top of a truck driving through town, shouting *`min dae, min dae'*.

You actually have to make the best of it. Some chaps just sat around and said `The army is lousy and I'm bored'. If you wanted to, you could always find something to do, always find some activity to arrange, and you could make the best of any situation. Some chaps could see one of the RSM's tasks as - we're sitting on this truck, we've got to go and throw these blocks of concrete at the dump; `Hey, guys, we're going to the dump!' and off we went, we would throw the stuff off and then we would run along after the truck, and we would be slipping off while he was going. We actually made fun of it while we were going along.

I think a lot of it depends on your attitude and how you approach it. I'm speaking as the grand `we' here. At Ladysmith I was with a different group of chaps, but the main thing is that you make the best of it. We had a staff

sergeant who came down on the chefs heavy. He hated the chefs, so he made sure that we were at every parade, and we had to be at this and we had to be at that, so between doing parades and doing our duties we had virtually no free time. I remember one time I was coming off night duty and being woken up about three times by different corporals saying `What are you doing - still sleeping now.' `I was on night duty. Give men a break.'

I remember scrubbing my uniform, scrubbing my boots, scrubbing my web belt anywhere, and the staff called me out because my beret badge was a little bit grubby, which you can't help when you are in the kitchen, and I got CB drill for a grubby beret badge. CB Drill meant having to move your tent every four hours, and then stand inspection in it in the new site in between. I could have got pretty negative about things like that, but again, you just make the best of it. At inspections we had competitions with all of the other sections, in those huge big triple story bungalows, and we just made the best of it.

I remember going down to the QM. One of the other chefs had lost a whole lot of his kit, so he took along a whole lot of tins of condensed milk, and slipped it to the chaps who worked at the QM. He said; `You organise that stuff for me.' He had a sleeping bag that he had got legitimately, and the staff sergeant at the QM was walking around and screaming `Look at all this stuff' to an infantry instructor. `We used to have a whole lot of stuff. Where is the stuff disappearing to?'. He was walking along and the guys were walking behind him, grabbing gloves and throwing it to this chap who was putting it into his sleeping bag, and socks and web belts and sewing kits, walking behind the staff looking very concerned about all the stuff that's going missing, and the guy was screaming blue murder; `There's just too much stuff going missing.' I just stood there watching it.

At 5 SAI our Staff Sergeant was unfortunately rather a slimy sort of guy. He hated the chefs and he hated the ou manne, and he hated the company and he just wanted to make us pay. Nobody really respected him. We listened and we jumped when he called, but no-one really respected him, and the corporals were young eighteen year old chaps who were trying to prove themselves, so no one had respect for them either. The chaps in the kitchen too; the Sergeant Major never really knew what was going on. He was constantly running around pulling his hair out; *`Wat gaan aan? Wat gaan aan?'* He never knew what was cutting.

The corporal in the kitchen at 5 SAI - I stayed with him and his wife for the first couple of days when I arrived because there was no place for me. He was a nice chap, soft-hearted, who had dreams of going into his own business, but he didn't have ambition. He didn't have any back-bone, so he could never stand up to the sergeant major or anybody. He just got shunted around, and he managed to do what he had to, and he was actually into the bottle. He would come on to the weekend duty and you would see him sneak off and have a dop around the corner, and come back. He would sometimes stare and you could see his eyes swimming, and he didn't know what was going on. You would go up to him and say; `Look, corporal, we've run out of this. What must we do?' He would go; `Um... um ... er ... well.' You had to make do yourself.

There were the sad stories. There were the cruel chaps, there were the guys with no ambition, there were the guys who were as thick as planks.

There were also excellent leaders, chaps with character. At 5 SAI, the guy I respected the most was the RSM, because he was a genuine chap who had good discipline, and he knew how to treat men. He knew how to discipline us, but he also knew how to encourage and get the best. In the whole army you meet the dregs and you meet the cream. I think that's the case in the army. You've just got to discern what's going on and make the best of what you can, and just remember the cream; the chaps that you came into contact with who were the cream; your friends, your leaders - the ranks above you.

You remember those guys and you just put your memories of the other guys out of the way. You've got the PF chaps who are just in there because they can do nothing else, and who are trying to make their way through life. You've got the PFs who are cruel and who fancy themselves as Rambos. And you've got the PF chaps who are incredibly genuine, and you sit down and try to think out logically how could such a good chap join PF? My brother joined PF Navy, so I've got to say that!

ADJUSTMENT TO CIVVY LIFE

Because I had such a good time in the army and such an easy time, and at the same time looking forward to getting back to civvy street, I didn't have any problems. Possibly I lost contact with most of my friends. When you finish school, a lot of your school friendships dissipate. I only really had one friend from school. I had made all these good buddies in the army and suddenly they were sitting in Durban and Jo'burg. For a while there was a little bit of loneliness, because I was in my own flat in the centre of town without any transport. My one buddy from school; as I came out of the army, he went into the army, so he was in the army and all my army friends were sitting all over South Africa. There was a bit of loneliness for a while because I just didn't have any friends in the city, but I had a grand time on civvy street; I could cook whenever I wanted to. I could go and get videos.

If I had come straight from Windhoek there wouldn't have been much of a difference, but coming from 5 SAI where there was this incredible discipline on the *Ou Manne*, and having to practise for this parade where we had to be really sharp. We knew that we were soon going to be *klaaring* out after two years, and now I have to do all this sort of stuff. At the end it was actually good because we were on the parade ground. You could see the faces of the roofies when they were looking at our drilling - we were hammered with this drilling, and by the time the parade came along, every single move was synchronised. It was incredible to see everybody moving as one. The roofies had their mouths open wide; `We didn't know that the *Ou Manne* could drill like this!'

Right at the end, the RSM who hovered between opinions about the kind of person he was said; `I know as you walk out of the gate you are going to pull a rude sign at me, so I am going to get mine in first,' and he went and pulled this huge rude sign at us. He was actually a very good ouk. We ended on a positive note. We walked out of the camp gates feeling like disciplined soldiers who could actually do a good job of things. There were a whole lot of benefits to it. We enjoyed the civvy life.

In the army, I enjoyed the slackness of Windhoek, but even though I hated the discipline of having to do CB drill, I actually felt when I walked out that I had not walked out winding down, I had walked out as a disciplined soldier. If I look back, everything was positive. Because of the discipline of 5 SAI, and because I had been looking forward to going home, that's why I enjoyed it so much. I look at those things as blessings because if I had come straight out of Windhoek, then it wouldn't have been such a big deal, but coming out of 5 SAI with all the time tables and strict discipline schedules - `At this time you will be doing this' - coming home and suddenly being able to lie on the couch whenever I wanted to, to be able to cook whenever I wanted to, to go walking the streets, to go out to movies or whatever, I loved it. Of course I started making friends again, and I started getting back into church and I started getting acquainted with everybody, and from then on it was fine.

One of the biggest blows, just before klaaring out, we heard that National Service had been reduced to a year, and all the roofies who had a year to go, suddenly they had three months, so they were walking around telling us *`min dae'*. That was rather a blow for us! I said to my buddy from school; `Come to the army and get it over with. Then you can enjoy the rest of your life,' and he said `No' and he messed around here and he messed around there, and he was going into the army as I was coming out of the army, and he was saying `I should have listened to you, because [if I had] by now I would be klaaring out with you, and we could enjoy ourselves, and now I'm going in for a whole two years.' I was saying; `Ja, you see.'

Suddenly, when I saw him again, he said; `I'm only going in for a year!' I felt a little bit hard done by. There were a number of hard core bitter reactions. One guy who was quite a character was just working around the camp - there was something in the army called `schnaaied' - he was going; `Hey! We've been schnaaied! We've been schnaaied!' He would go up to people and shout; `We've been schnaaied!' There weren't many bitter reactions; there was just surprise, shock and horror. There was an under current of; `Goodness me. We've done two years, and now these chaps are only doing one.'

We shared the expectancy that our camps would be done away with. For us that was a benefit, so we weren't going to complain. To me, that was the biggest schlep coming. I don't mind doing two years national service, but then I wanted to get on with my life. I didn't want it to be interrupted by periodic camps. I think that everybody else felt that way too. We were looking forward to not having to do camps, which of course now is not the case. The guys do no army now, and the guys who have done it have to do the camps as well. Its just one of those things.

The army had strict control over kit. You had to give all your kit back at the end or pay for it. You wouldn't get your *klaaring* out form until you had paid for your kit. This was from 5 SAI - leaving 5 SAI, everybody was square. I can understand berets and things like that, but a SAMIL?

Windhoek was hard but those guys weren't really permanent force, so they were treating it as a joke. That is permanent force army - they were constantly drunk and constantly stealing from the army, but they had their own characters.

What I remember most of the army - with all the negative bits - was positive, a wonderful two years. Two years that I am glad that I went through

because it built my character, put backbone into me, taught me to stand on my own two feet; being away in Windhoek for six months with no pass at all. If I still was tied to the apron strings, I actually cut them then, and I learned to stand on my own two feet as a young man; it gave me discipline. I made wonderful friends and my character developed.

I really don't understand the guys with bad attitudes because those guys would end up with their two years being absolutely miserable, hating every second of it and bucking the system constantly, plus they would take every single gap that they possibly could, and I think that when they walked out they would have minimal self respect, because even though in your own mind you are saying; `This is rubbish and I shouldn't be doing it,' at then end of the day when you come out you don't actually have much self respect because you've spent the whole two years trying to duck things. After all the experiences that I have told you of, I am probably speaking to myself. I didn't see it like that. It wasn't to get out of things, it was to get extra things. When we had to do things, we did it. We did it positively, and made the best of it. I feel that I walked out of the army with some self respect. I had done a good job as a chef, I had done a good job as an *ou man*, and it was positive.

I never saw action, but I heard horrific stories, so I know that there must be chaps who go through incredible stuff. Call me `blessed', but I had a good time. There were chaps who were totally negative about the whole experience, but I really loved it. Maybe not at the time, but now I look back with incredible memories. I'm glad I did it.

Chapter Eighteen

Jacques Malan
10 Artillery Brigade, Potchefstroom 1989 - 1990
61 Mechanised Battalion, Walvis Bay

INTRODUCTION

I was born in 1970, so didn't know much about any of the politics of the seventies. Lack of brains and interest I supposed, like all children. I did know something of the army, my uncle was drafted, a long time ago, and I remembered a parade, very probably commando, in Bethal town when I was very small. I must have been four or five years old. My uncle was at the side when the parade drilled by and I remember being very impressed with their guns. At that time they were using the R1.

I was a member of the Voortrekkers. It was very nice paramilitary organization, supposed to be the Afrikaans version of the Boy Scouts, with very much the same uniform, but by the time I was there the uniform was brown shoes, knee length socks, brown shorts, a dressy sort of shirt with all your badges you could earn sown to your sleeve, a brown tie and a beret. At all the camps there was flag raising parades with *"skriflesing en gebed"* (scripture and prayers) every morning and evening. Sometimes when they were feeling generous the parade was in normal clothing, but mostly it was in uniform. We had lectures in fieldcraft and survival, slept in army tents (on the ground of course), and had inspection every morning. I didn't think those camps would have been possible without the logistical support of the army because all the catering equipment, the tents, generators and lights were supplied by the army.

In 1983 my father was called up for the Buttermilk camps, when all the older men who weren't drafted or did military service were militarised. A two week camp with some drill training and lectures and they were all given R1's to take home and a set of browns, ready for the *"rooi gevaar"*.[31]

One of the teachers of my school also went and it was quite funny to see him, a very snazzy dresser, in roofie-new browns and boots. His rifle was hanging from his shoulder with a piece of ski-rope.

I went to high school in 1983. That of course meant having to do *"Jeugweerbaarheid"* and *"Geestesweerbaarheid"*. The boys and girls were split during the *Jeugweerbaarheid* period, the girls doing things like first aid (I think, I never was really in touch with the girls), and all the boys were sent to the rugby field to learn how to drill.

The *Geestesweerbaarheid* was a semi religous period, with all sorts of team programs to help us see the evil. I remember one movie about the dangers of smoking, with yucky pictures of nicotine coated lungs, and another

[31] Red, or communist, danger.

on the *"totale aanslag"* (total onslaught) on the morals of the youth. These days the youth do worse things and nobody worries.

The drilling was two periods on a Friday, total one hour and after it was finished we had break and then another two periods school. In Standard Six it was horrible. We had this very big mouthed matric sergeant to shout us around and we had to run whenever we did something wrong. All part of the normal standard procedure, take it or you're a sissie.

The officers were the normal teachers from school who wore their uniforms on Fridays. The uncommisioned teachers hung around in normal clothes just looking bored. We were all issued with brown shorts and shirts and had nice brown berets. It had some sort of gloss emblem on the front, I can't remember (springbok, maybe?).We had to wear the uniform to school every Friday, including winter. The shorts in winter were rather horrible. We normally had on long grey trousers with the shorts underneath. A quick strip and bingo, one *"parate klein kadet"*. Every end of the year there was an official parade and some poor Colonel had to come from Pretoria and take the salute.

In 1987 Bronkhorstpsruit gave the Freedom of Bronkhorstspruit to State President P W Botha. The cadets had to give him a nice parade, the start of the long day. It was a big rigmarole, happening in late November, during the exams, and in between we had to practise. The most interesting part was the escorting officers, a colonel and a navy officer (commodore?), the first time we saw a navy officer with sword and medals. We even were inspected. When the president walked past me I was surprised that he was shorter than I was. I am about 1.8m tall.

In July 1986 I did a two week cadet camp at Wallmansthal, north of Pretoria. We spent most mornings on the parade ground, did an official evaluation, which I passed, and I was proclaimed a *Kadetinstrukteur* (Cadet instructor). We got a nice red shiny badge to wear on our left chest.

I had some hopes of getting somewhere. It didn't happen. It was very disappointing to see people who didn't do a single camp get promoted to cadet sergeant majors. At least I was made a sergeant.

Also in 1986 we had to register. That had to happen whenever we turned sixteen. I didn't complain, [as] we got released from drilling that day.

We had some camps organized by the local commando, a long weekend usually. We were dressed up in totally oversized overalls, a bush hat, web belt and a waterbottle, sleeping gear our own worries, and we were given *varkpanne*. The normal lectures on fieldcraft and the *rooi gevaar*, a long night of night marches with a compass, standing guard, and then, the highlight of the weekend, the only reason I always went, an opportunity to shoot a rifle. Always a R1 because that's all the commando had. Sometimes a sort of display, with pyrotechnics, and one very memorable year they even exploded a Claymore anti-personnel mine for us. That was at the Zonderwater shooting range, the Genl Piet Joubert Skietbaan. We were also allowed to keep the empty cases, I had a small string of 7,62 LMG cases with the links.

I always expected to be called up, [as] we were very well indoctrinated. Do your duty to your country. An added incentive was of course that if you didn't go you would be sent to jail. The other option, that quite a few choose, was to go to the police for four years. It was only a long time afterwards that I

learned that you could also get exemption if you became and stayed for six years an ambulance [paramedic?] or Fireman, or went to the merchant marine.

I didn't for one moment consider evading it. I only had to choose if I wanted to go to university first. Halfway through matric I realised that I didn't have a clue what I'm supposed to do at the university, (and I still don't know, but that's another story), so by sort of default I decided, or let it be decided for me, that I should go to the army. The only people I knew about [then] was the End Conscription Campaign, and they were very dangerous people.

I was unfit throughout my life and I wasn't going to let the idea of army change me. The nearest thing to exercise I got was to do a hiking trail of six days at the beginning of January 1989. The result of shoes that didn't fit properly, blue big toe nails on both feet, that fell off shortly afterwards and I went into the army without big toe nails. How many people can say that?

INKLAAR, 31 JANUARIE 1989

Fear, terror, tears and angst were not part of my *aanmelding*.[32] My father took me to Pretoria Station. There was nobody I knew, when suddenly my cousin came past. He was going to intelligence at Potchefstroom. Happy reunion, I'm going to 10 Artillery Brigade, also at Potchefstroom, gladness all around, and [yet] we didn't see each other for two years.

We were taken by bus to Voortrekkerhoogte, there was a sort of induction centre, they made sure everyone had papers, and knew where they were going. We had our first army meal, I only remembered I didn't eat the peas. Some very frightening soldiers with red hats searched through our luggage. He asked me if I got a knife, and I trembling with terror. I showed him my little Okapi on my keys. He just gave me a smile and said that's okay. A schoolpal of mine was carrying needles and medication for bee stings, and they had him out of the queue and into a tent and he had to do some quick explaining.

Afterwards a train just stopped in the veldt next to the tents and we all got on. It was my second train trip. All the way to Potchefstroom. When we got off the train, we were split into two groups. Those for Intelligence one side, and the Artillery the other. We had a few Samil 50's to pick us up with a nice *roofie* ride to camp. The *snuffeltiffies* also had Samils, but their Samils were guarded with soldiers wearing battle jackets, and magazines on their rifles.

On arrival at the camp we were told to get off. There was food being handed out. I can't remember how we ate it, we certainly didn't have any kit at that stage. Afterwards we were told to wait while they were calling out our names. We waited, and we waited, and we waited some more. I was wearing shorts and a short sleeve shirt, and Potch gets bloody cold at night. My name was called after 10 that night.

We were taken to our tents, to put down our bags, [were] put in a squad and moved (not drilled, no footstamping allowed) to the stores, and issued with a mattress, *trommel*, blankets. The sequence is a bit hazy, I was very tired and confused. We had to carry everything up to the tents, (and a mattress

[32] mustering

and *trommel* and blankets are very heavy at four o'clock in the morning) and told to sleep. Next morning I can't remember anything. It must have been the standard hurry up and wait sort of process, because we only got our kit late that night as well. We were taken to the stores again, organised into another of these famous army queues, and had to strip to our underwear. Most were not an inspiring sight.

Then we were issued kit. First trousers, shirts, socks, tekkies,[33] of which we had to put on one to see if it fit, then were given the rest. By the end we were decently dressed. After everything was issued, the list was read out, and everyone had to check he had everything. It was dark, I couldn't count and got an extra pair of socks issued. Afterwards the signing for the kit, it could have been anything written on there, we didn't know. I'm not even sure I knew my force number by that stage. Dark and tired. Apparently the kit was worth about R3000.

The next morning, on the Samils again, taken to the hospital in Potch for medical checks. We went through all the checkups, including being asked if I was gay. Got a piece of paper, and was officially declared G1K1. Highest medical clearance, can be expected to do anything, anywhere. When I went to hand it in, that big-mouthed sergeant I had in Standard Six was sitting behind the desk, a full Lieutenant in the Permanent Force, and he did recognize me. Fortunately he was assigned to a 143 Battery so I never saw him close up again.

That medical paper made a big difference. All the nice walking everywhere, no running, immediately changed into *"roer jou gat, en hardloop"*.[34]

Then there was another calm week of preparing the base. We had to remove all grass, and if the bombardier sees you leaning on a spade the spade gets a turn to lean on you. Absolutely the most terrible thing about that week was the constant rain. Everything was muddy, and since some bright spark (probably PF) had some red clay brought in and spread before the battery offices everything was a terrible red muddy mess. Someone got desperate enough and trucks full of gravel were brought in.

A lot of guys from a too big intake at 5 SAI in Ladysmith arrived. They were mostly from Natal, mostly English speaking, and very pissed off at being so far from home. It took a few weeks before they were assimilated.

The battery was split in two parts. Half got placed in the bungalows, and the other half, me included, got placed in the tents next to the battery offices. We weren't allowed in the bungalow, and there were temporary washrooms next to the bungalow. It had gas-fired heaters that never worked, so we always got cold water. Our mess was a wooden structure with a tin roof. The first night I walked into the tent there was a ground sheet, six beds and cupboards, and the kakiebos at the entrance touched me under my arms. I got an opportunity to switch the next day. One of my tentmates was at school with me. His surname was Marais. I sat behind him in the hall when we were writing our matriculation exams.

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[33] Sneakers, or running shoes.
[34] "Move your arse and run"

The tents were put up by the leadergroup before we arrived. The twelve of them had to put up about 50 tents in a day, and thay did make a big mess of it. We had to redo all their work.

We were six in the tent. Me and Marais, were from the same school. A Le Roux, from the Cape Province, two guys from Middelburg, Transvaal, and one from Witbank. The chap from Witbank only had Standard Six, the Middelburgers had Standard Nine, us other three all had Matric exemption and were going to university. Marais and Le Roux went to Artillery School, becoming a Bombardier and 2nd Lieutenant respectively.

There were two other chaps first, but they removed themselves to the bungalow by some means. One was an interesting example. In the beginning he wanted to become PF but as the week went on the rain started to wear him out and his enthusiasm waned very quickly. The tent was leaking like sieve, and we were sleeping in our sleeping bags, because the beds were wet through. My sheets even got some mildew spots on them, which were still on them some months later. We were supposed to exchange them every week, but that never happened.

We also had a sports day at Potchefstroom University's sport fields, 142 coming second after Bde HQ and Artillery School.

The first haircut was quite short, and it was amazing how the people you learned to recognize in the previous five days become characterless. I did get used to it again.

The first few week felt just like a camp, I've been on many, and this wasn't strange. Afterwards I was used to anything.

BASIC TRAINING: 20 FEBRUARY 1989

Basic training started about two weeks after we arrived. We weren't told it's starting, just one morning we were taken to the parade ground for two hours of drill. That was the norm for the rest of basics. Two hours drill every morning. I do believe that was what made us fit. Walking around quickly for two hours each day, swinging our arms vigorously, just the recipe the fitness professionals told us would work. The PT session each afternoon was a joke. Just an excuse to chase us around. I don't believe we got any aerobic benefits from that at all.

A group from each battery was chosen to do biokinetics tests. There were doctors from 1 Military Hospital and some people from the Potchefstroom University who did all sorts of tests on us, including running on a treadmill. We were retested after basics, and the difference in my case was quite amazing.

The people from 141 Battery had the only fitness instructor in the entire base and their biokinetics group was taken out every day for PT by him. I don't know if it made any difference. Twice a week we had to put on our battle jackets and *staaldakke*[35] and go to the field outside the base for field training. Every battery went to a different area around the base.

At six weeks we got a weekend pass, to go home and let our mothers wash all our clothes. My mother wasn't very impressed with my efforts, but I

[35] steel helmets

considered it good considering that we had to wash in Fire buckets with cold water. I also didn't iron a single piece of clothing during the entire basics. We weren't allowed to go into the bungalow, and there was only one plug in the mess.

After the first pass the parents were allowed to come and visit on weekends. They could even take the troops out of the base to town, and give them some decent food.

The first of April, Swapo entered Namibia. The MRL's from 4 Art left the base and the sergeant got volunteers who spend an afternoon loading missiles onto a train. The OP trained officers also left and went to Namibia.

Basics were just there. Most of the lectures were incredibly boring. All we wanted to do was sleep. I saw one guy sitting up at the mess with his chin on his *staaldak* and he didn't have a clue on what was going on around him.

We also did our first guard duty. We could stay in the base, which we did normally, or could be assigned to look after the Ammo Corps place a few kilometres away, or we could be sent to the magazine. One bright guy stole an exercise grenade from the magazine and blew his hand away. Some of the troops doing basics with us were to become PF members of the Ammo Corps. They had green berets, and were allowed to have slightly longer hair. I remember once after haircut when the bombardier asked one guy why his hair wasn't cut he replied: "Ammo Corps Bombardier, I refuse to cut my hair."

Some other units I believe had to do their entire basics dressed in battle jackets and *staaldakke* and carrying their rifles. We only started rifle drills in about the fourth week, and otherwise we only carried our rifles for field lectures.

I remember the boredom the most. The entire three months was a blur. You know you had to get it over with, it's not enjoyable and if an instructor is in a bad mood nothing can make him better.

The brigade sergeant major (can't remember his surname, we just called him Sampie (Claasens?)) was the most feared person on the base. Our Bombardier said to us at the beginning we had to be very careful if we see him. He was a short man with a green patch behind the AOI[36] badge. One of the guys just said: *'n Klein groen mannetjie* (little green man). Everybody, including the bombardier laughed at that. That sergeant major became "*Kommandement Noord Transvaal*" sergeant major. He was a real professional soldier. During sport parades he always called the 2nd Lieutenants "Sir", respect they didn't get very often, not even from the troops.

The instructors were the normal sort. National Servicemen who went to Artillery School. We had a Bombardier Strydom, who joined PF during basics. He wasn't very professional. He spent a lot of the time in the one of the tents talking nonsense. The officer changed during basics, our original one was the administrative officer and he couldn't cope with everything. We didn't have much to do with the other platoons instructors, except during the lectures in the mess.

We had a PF sergeant, who was in charge mostly. He also left the army shortly after basics. The sergeant major was on course during most of the year

[36] Afrikaans abbr.: *Adjutant Offisier 1ste Klas* (*English*: Warrant Officer 1st Class)

and we saw him only a few times. The battery commander, Captain Oelofse, was a short little man, apparently with Springbok colours in judo.

The people who were potential Junior Leaders went on a long route march for a few days, coming back with blisters and horror stories. The chosen ones went to Artillery School in the middle of April.

At the end of basics, Saturday 29 April 1989, we had an open day with a brigade parade. It wasn't that special because all the people selected for Artillery school had already left, and then they made it a brigade parade which means half the troops on parade were from 4 Artillery Regiment. It was a miserably cold day, and fortunately I warned my parents to bring along warm clothes. We were freezing on parade with short sleeve shirts. After the parade there was a demonstration shoot by all the pieces. That was also the first time we saw the guns shooting.

There was a rifle and LMG demonstration, and afterwards an infantry attack, including a RPG being fired. Then all the Artillery pieces. First the 120mm Mortar, also shooting rocket assist projectiles, the G1 (25 pounder), G2 (5.5 inch), the G5 and the Valkyrie Multiple Rocket Launcher. Afterwards we went home for a week's leave.

The end of basics parade, the entire 10 Artillery Brigade on the parade ground. In the front, Cmdt Holtzhausen, commander of 14 Artillery Regiment. 4 Artillery Regiment and Brigade HQ were also there.

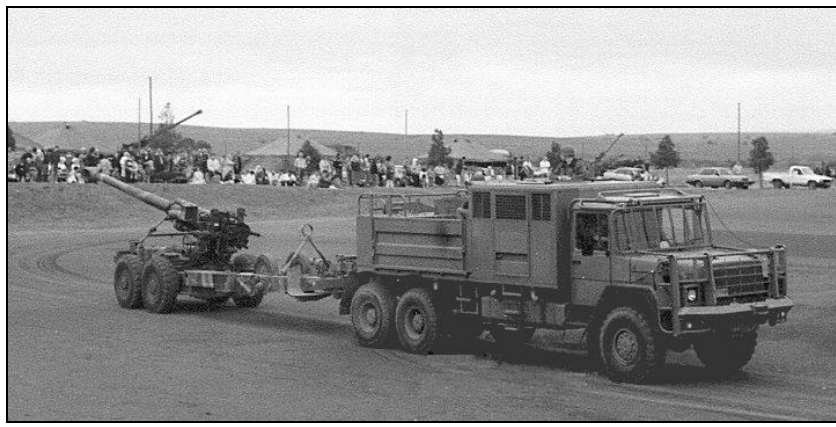
ARTILLERY TRAINING

PHASE 1, 141 BATTERY: MAY 1989

After we got back from that leave, we were asked what we wanted to do. I wanted to become a technical assistant (TA), the person who is responsible for the calculations for the laying of the guns. There were too many so I opted for observation post assistant. We were lucky and could choose. Some of the other batteries just told their people where to go, no choices.

Then all the training groups were regrouped into different batteries. We, the TA's, OPA's and the surveyors were all grouped into 141, the drivers were sent to 142 (my old battery), 143 I can't remember [what their role was], but

[they were] possibly the MRL crews, 144 were all the G5 gun crews, 2 Medium were the aristocracy, the first group to be trained on the G6, and 145 were the softies from Regiment HQ, the REMF's (Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers). All the G4K4's were there, doing the administrative work, the potential medics were sent there (they had to hang around for five months before they were sent on their course), the number 6's on the guns, who were supposed to be the technical guys, were supposed to be doing their course, [but] never did anything that we were aware of, and we never saw them again.



A G5 and Guntrekker on the Parade Ground.

We slept in tents again, right next to our old lines. Of course the bungalow stayed empty. We did our training, mostly theoretical with lectures on ballistics, how to lay a gun on target and map reading. I enjoyed that part very much. We were a nice group, strangely enough more than half the group were English speaking, so my English improved very much, and after a while the language of choice was Eglish. Even the Afrikaans guys talked English to each other.

We did a shooting range sweep one day. The entire regiment was arranged in a line and we walked across the Potch shooting range, having to look for dud ammunition so that it could be destroyed afterwards. I only saw one 120 round that could be something. Of course some of the idiots picked up some components of shells for souveniers. They each had to dig a hole, 2m x 2m x 2m to bury that in.

We all had to repeat that litany. *"Ek verklaar dat ek geen lewendige ammunisie, leë doppies of enige deel daarvan in my besit het nie, Luitenant"* (I declare that I don't have any live ammunition, empty cartridges or any part thereof in my posession, Lieutenant) Apparently the Lieutenant part was important, as the declaration had to be made to an officer.

We were also volunteered for a parade. It was the 14 Artillery Regiment memorial parade. There was a memorial with a G1 (25 pounder, 88mm) on it. We worked very hard and developed a way with some hand signals of doing the entire parade without the time being called out, including caps off and caps on.

That day we also went on leave. When we came back the key to the gun lockup was gone. We waited a week and when we finally got our rifles found that the roof has been leaking. It was a mess.

PHASE 2 - 2 MEDIUM BATTERY: JULY 1989

After two months in 141 all the OPA's were moved again, this time to 2 Medium, for further training. Together we also got some guys who were sent from the other batteries to become OP signallers. We started our first training in radio procedures. The only bad part was being with the G6 prima donnas, who never were on time for roll call. Their instructors were civilians from the manufacturers, so they had a nice time. Our bombardier was a little blonde Greek guy, Bdr Monoyoudis; we were about 40 in the group.

One day we were told to put on our mooi-moois (fancy dress: cravats, shoulder flashes, white leggings and belts). We were taken by bus to Air Force base Snake Valley in Centurion. There was a hangar full of captured Angolan and Cuban equipment. They gave us a tour through the facility, showing us everything, starting up the engines, explaining the weak points of the vehicles. There were BRDM's, BTR's, a SAM-8 system, SAM-6 systems, jeeps and trucks. There even was a MiG-21 without wings that did a forced landing in Northern Namibia after getting lost. I believe that aircraft is now in the Air Force Museum at Zwartkops Air Force Base.

The commander was a captain. When we went to the field for field training he was in charge. A thoroughly professional soldier, an absolute pleasure to work with. He even took us for PT session, using a little blue book, and that was the only time I felt the PT was worthwhile. He was also the first commander I had who looked after the welfare of the troops. He had two chefs in the veldt and he made sure the food was good and enough. Even during the week we ate rat packs the chef's duties included making sure there was hot water for shaving every morning at five. That in July, in the winter in Potchefstroom when the water bunker was completely frozen. The chefs even had to supply hot water after meals to wash our dixies in. All the cleaning duties were handed out to the light duties, so no one wanted to become ill.

Our training started to get serious. The map reading was difficult in the beginning, but it was getting right. The first day a gun shot from the Ammo Corps area, so we saw our first explosions. We learned all the procedures, learned to draw the panorama sketches. It was absolutely miserably cold. None of us undressed or washed for the entire three weeks. I got into my sleeping bags (we were issued with inners before we went out) with my boots on and with my rifle, because everything were covered in frost in the mornings.

We moved out from our stand to another position one night, had to dig new trenches in the dark, and be ready the next morning. We stayed there a few days. While there, Impala's did bombing on the range, coming over our heads to toss bomb some target and then turning and shooting at the targets with their cannon. The last day the wind was blowing, we even had some sleet falling, and Pienaar couldn't get a fire bucket even slightly warm using six fuel tablets. We had to close the trenches at night, and march back to our base.

We even did a night march, a sort of bucket crawl where we had to touch a bucket before we were seen. We won, mostly through good luck and Wessels, who got us lost so that we arrived after the guards were fast asleep.

The rest of 2 Medium joined the OP's just after we left. One of them picked up a mortar round in the field and took it home on leave with him and killed and wounded a few people in his parents' kitchen.

BACK TO 142: EXERCISE *DIEPDINK*

After that was finished all the trainees were sent back to their batteries. That was in the middle of July. We were the first group to *klaar* back into 142, where most of the drivers still were. That afternoon we had to take part in a big *opfok* because the battery was *slapgat*. When we complained we didn't have anything to do with that Lt Jacobie just said it would do us good. The gunners came back a few days later.

We were a G5 battery. 141 were the potential Parabats, with the 120mm Mortars. They never went there because only 50 out of 110 passed the parachute course. They spent their last part doing patrols in KwaZulu Natal. 143 had the MRL's. 144 also had G5 guns and 2 Medium had the G6's.

The battery commander was Lt Rademeyer, 2IB (*tweede in bevel*, second in command) was Lt Herbst.

The entire unit had to regroup again and recreate a sense of indentity. That took a very long time. The drivers were considered the softies, the gunners thought themselves very tough; nobody understood what the TA's and surveyors did.

The field training with the guns started in the middle of August. All the Observation post people were grouped together under the command of 2IB (*tweede in bevel*, second in command) of 14 Artillery, Capt de Villers. We were issued with Ratels. Our Ratel was a Ratel 60. We were very proud of it, 144's OP's got a Samil 50 for a vehicle. For our battery the Drivers was Chenel and Pieterse; Wessels, Britz and I were the OPA's and the signallers were van Dyk, Alison and a guy whose name I can't remember. There was also another trained OP signaller, Sutton, who got himself assigned to the TA's vehicle where his friends were. The officer responsible for the OP's was 2nd Lieutenant Herbst.

There was a general blurring of duties. All the OPA's were also trained as signallers, so we also took turns at the radio. The first shooting with the guns was quite an experience. We had seen it before but we weren't responsible. There also were quite a few cock-ups. One day when the battery read through the position report it shows they were 200m from us. One gun got a projectile stuck in the barrel. The No 1 was Strydom. It [the battery] had to sleep outside the base for a few days until they figured out how to remove it.

One day our officers were gone, so we were assigned to the commander from artillery school. While we were busy he got a message that one of his instructors [had] lost his hand in an accident with a 120 mortar. He also had to leave.

Marais (who was with me in Basics) told me later that he found the Bombardier's hand in the grass. [Evidently] the safety was assembled wrong. They tried to fire but nothing happened, [so they] set the mortar to safe, and

when he [the Bombadier] tried to extract the projectile, [he accidentally] pushed it onto the "safe" firing pin.

Lieutenant Rademeyer was temporary Battery commander. He used to be a sergeant in the MRL battery attached to 32 Battalion. He didn't have any training in OP procedures so we had another enjoyable time teaching him. I even managed to get him once to give me a triangular beacon as a target. We also did our first night shoot on a very rocky hill. It was spectacular to see the sparks fly.

The nice part about field deployments in Potch shooting range was the speed. All [of] the convoy's speed was regulated at 20km/h. I spend many happy hours sleeping in the back of the Ratel. In that narrow corridor next to the engine it is nice and cozy, sleeping on the bags.

For some reason the OP teams went into the base one Saturday. It was an eerie experience. The PF's who were not in the veldt were at home, and the entire regiment, including RHQ were in the field. The base was dead, empty and silent with no movement.

Beginning of September the battery training was over. We then did some training on small arms. *"Kleinkaliber wapens"* it was called. The LMG's, RPG, Snotneus and 12.7 and 7.62 Brownings as well as the 60mm mortar. The guys issued with the LMG's had to give back their R4's. Not a good deal at all. Ammunition was scarce, and I wasn't one of the chosen. The only thing I did was shoot one shell from a 60mm as the loader, and get to aim it with another. We also got one hand grenade throw. There were also some pyrotechnic displays. We also did Alpha Bravo movements for contacts.

The last day we did a sort of shoot as ending of the course. I got about 90 R4 rounds and shot them out into the field at tins and anthills. The Brownings also shot from the mounts on top of the Guntrekkers. That was all spoiled when an officer shot a flare into the long grass.

Fighting fires was a constant occupation during the training. Since the OP's were at the front we got to put out all the fires caused by the guns. Only once or twice when things were really bad the gunners were brought to help. One week we were wakened every morning at two o'clock to go out and put out fires. Once in the gun positions a fire went through, destroying some kit.

LOHATLA, OCTOBER 1989

Rumours abounded about Lohatla. One officer even told us Lohatla is so big that a unit once got lost for three days. We certainly didn't know what to expect. The exercise name I can't remember. (*Ystervuis*? – *ed.*)

The major part of the entire exercise was getting ready for the trip. The entire regiment had to move with all the lack of vehicles to their disposal. The vehicles were divided into parcels. Every parcel had to leave the base every 15 minutes. That was to make sure there is not a complete traffic jam all the way to Lohatla. And so that the poor Civvies could get past us, because the convoy speed was very low, I believe it was 60 kph. We also were not to drive at night, so that stopover would be at Vryburg. We even got a quick pass into town to draw money and buy things. That was the army equivalent of a package trip. There was some sort of military base there where we refuelled.

In our case that didn't matter, because the entire next day the other OP Ratel towed us because our Ratel was, as usual, in trouble.

We arrived at Lohatla during the next day. It was still daylight, and we weren't very much impressed. The main road from the gate to our place went past the SADFI store, which none of us had ever seen before. They gave us a compound at the Eastern end of the base. It was a great place. There was a sort of a hangar where the tiffies worked, and we waited for our Ratel, again. The washing facilities were absolutely great. They were well designed, big enough and we had lots of hot water, for the first time.

The chefs got a place where they could put their mobile kitchens. It was just a sort of a sink roof with concrete floor. We certainly ate there, I don't know about the other batteries. We slept in tents. It was about 10 to a tent, in sleeping bags, on the groundsheet, with a nice sandy floor. Quite comfortable.

The first time we went out it was quite interesting. Very little [few] trees but lots of knee level shrubs, with thorns. Some places we could hardly walk. There were spots that had quite a few trees. There were some hills, but the rest was flat.

Like always, the OP's with the commanders went elsewhere. We usually went to the north, the batteries were deployed to the south. The first two week it was mostly exercising again. Making sure we wouldn't kill our own troops. We had a nice OP on a hill, overlooking a flat area, in the middle of which there was a single big tree. We called it First National Tree, [due to it] looking very much like the symbol of First National Bank. Some idiot with a Ratel 90 took it down. There we were joined up with some officers from artillery school. They had to make sure everything went right. There were some nice mistakes. One morning I was standing at the Ratel's door, when a projectile landed 100m from us. It is an interesting experience, the air seems to be sucked from your lungs. The Commandant was furious. All the gunners from all the batteries had to come to the OP positions where they were *kakked* on because they didn't do their work right.

Our battery had a nice start. Our shooting was quite good, but then it started to deteriorate. One night they had to redeploy in the dark. They had the OP report, while we were waiting for their position report. I was on guard, waiting. 2 o'clock in the morning they were finished, hours after the other batteries. I woke Lt Herbst, as we had to shoot in. First shot. Absolutely nothing - can't see where it landed. No flash; we even used the nightscope to look around the horizon to see if we could see some dust, but no. Check everything, asked the battery to check. Repeat, nothing. Three in the morning. No, forget about everything, we will sort it out in daylight.

The next morning we went to the battery. Lieutenant Rademeyer was quite angry. He went throught the entire process with the surveyors and the TA. The problem: the surveyors were using their own shortcuts and notebooks instead of the correct forms. Where those two shots landed we still don't know. Fortunately not on somebody's head, or we would have known.

Next problem came when we had to shoot in the guns. Fancy of course, wanting to show off in front of all the other OP's. The shots from gun 6 went in beautifully. Order: Battery left, 10, one shot fire for effect. Shot one to five, one kilometre away from the target, shot six, on target, shot seven and eight, away. The number three on the gun didn't have his sight correct.

Once, while preparing for a fire mission, [we received] a sudden warning over the radio. A MRL had lanched a rocket without being set up properly. It landed outside the Lohatla ground, near a farm house, after going over our heads. The gunner was setting up when there was a short circuit.

After that there weren't many problems. The gunnery was excellent, and even we pickey OP's were pleased. When we could give 25m corrections the guns are good. Every gun got its own elevation and bearing, the shots landing as one.

The two signallers were sent off to do *baanpatrollie* for a few days. While they were away I was the signaller. That time, I also saw a Citizen Force regiment equipped with tanks, not the Olifant. It was a small tank with the turret right at the back. I have never been able to find out what that was.

We did a lovely shoot from a high *koppie*. Because of the height the safety restriction were very relaxed, so most of the shots landed below us, but quite close. We could see the dust from the schrapnel from almost every shot. The MRL's had the airburst fuses, with a few just exploding mid-air, not reaching the target.

The main exercise started at about week three, and was scheduled for about a week. We were attached to operate as VOO (Front observation officer). We got an officer from somewhere who was our officer for the first part of the exercise. He was very subdued, we didn't see much of him. The first night we were driving or waiting for a long time. I went to sleep. Later on the driver told me we drove across a bridge which the sappers put up during the night.

The next morning we took part in an attack with the infantry. All our driver had to do was to stay close to the command Ratel. They did an attack on an imaginary enemy position. All the Ratels were standing in a row, shooting the hell out of a poor defenceless *koppie*. We just sat and enjoyed the spectacle, as we never saw Ratels shooting before. They all carried 20mm guns. After the shoot was over they shot white phosphorus flares and reversed as quickly as they could. Maybe they were afraid the *koppie* was going to attack back? I don't know how the infantry's minds work. Our Ratel couldn't keep up, so the driver had to make a quick U-turn.

We saw Mirage F1's and Impala's bombing. The F1's came very low over our heads, popped up and dive bombed another threatening koppie. The next were the Impalas, toss bombing the *koppie.*

Then next there was another attack, this time combined infantry and armour. The scenario was a minefield blocking progress. So everybody had to wait until the sappers cleared paths through the minefield. Meanwhile the infantry shot the hell out of the ground 10m in front of them while I saw some very half-hearted alpha, bravo movements going towards the front. I was sitting, very comfortably, highly illegal, against the camo net and spare wheel, just enjoying the show, with nothing to do. That was my first encounter with the Olifants and I was very surprised at the height of the Ratel. I looked down on the turret of one of the tanks from the top of the Ratel.

We deployed again with the infantry. While we were waiting, the entire 14 Artillery Regiment deployed in front of us. That was something I only saw a few times. The G6's were right in front of us and 143 to the left. When the infantry went too close to the guns to look, the artillery commander just

warned the infantry commander over the Radio that the Valkyries had a 100m backblast, and he should warn his troops.

The last part of the exercise, artillery wise, was a divisional fire mission. That didn't happen very often. It was 14 Artillery, 4 Artillery, and quite a few citizen force units. We OPA's weren't even allowed close. All the bigheads were down below, the chief OP was our old 2 Medium captain. We sat on the top viewpoint of the *koppie*.

Combined with the fire mission was a demonstration. There were a lot of civilians, sitting on a platform down below. Probably military attaches and press. We saw all the might of the SADF paraded in front of us. Three Olifants firing on the move. A Rooikat hiding under a camouflage net suddenly bursting out and giving a demonstration. The anti-aircraft tried to shoot down a little radio controlled aircraft with an Ystervark. They did manage to make a nice big hole in its wing but the final insult was the victory roll over their heads. The fire mission was conducted at the same time.

After all that we moved back to base. Pack up, go back to Potch. One day trip, extremely comfortable. Driver in front, van Dyk in the turret at the Radio's and Britz and I had a side of the Ratel each. I think I slept most of the way. We had an MP on a motorcycle chasing us through Potch, regulating the traffic.

Shortly afterwards the Commandant called us for a meeting. It was in 144's mess. He told us in strictest confidence that we are going to 61 Mech at Walvis Bay. We weren't allowed to tell our parent or anybody else, we were to tell them were going to Lohatla for some more training. All he did was confirm all the rumours, and I think that by then the entire base knew.

We had a braai, and some of the guys got their stripes, (one *kameelbyt* each). They were taken by the officers to the bar for a drink. I sold my beers to a chap in 141.

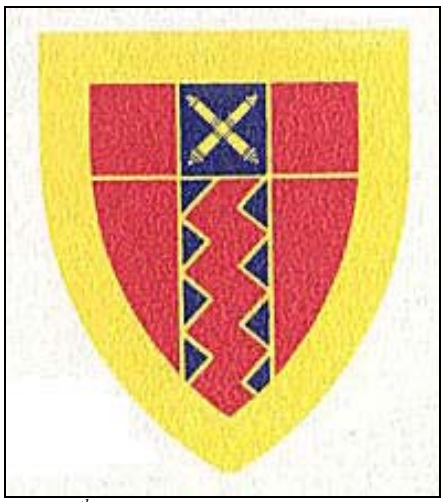
We *klaared* out from 14 Artillery, experiencing the delight of waiting for the storemen to do their work. We had to be at the stores at 7:00 in the morning. At 8:00 the storemen arrived, we counted and handed back equipment. At 9:00 they closed the doors for teatime, reopen at eleven, close for lunch at 12:00, reopen at 14:00, stopped for the day at 15:00. It felt like a century. Two of our binoculars had the wrong serial numbers, I got one of ours from the commander of 141 Battery. The other was gone, and Britz and I had to pay for it. It was about R250, and I wasn't impressed. In retrospect I should have kept the binoculars with the wrong serial number, no one would have missed them. 144's OP's had ours, they were still in Upington, doing something called *Riemvasmaak*. The drivers and signallers refused to help pay, but when some of the Ratels kit was missing they expected us to contribute, suddenly it was team again.

We got a week's pass, and when we came back we handed back the rest of our kit, and the trommels and mattresses. I think our rifles were handed in before we went on pass. The tiffies refused to take it back until it was clean. By the way, *ou manne* were wrong. It is just as difficult carrying a trommel and mattress back to the stores as up [from it].

Our new officers and NCO's joined us during that week.

That night we slept in the bungalow on the floor. Our tents were struck. Next morning we went to Potch aerodrome, the air force side. There was a

cute little hangar, and inside they were working on a seeker RPV. They were based at Potch then.



The 10th Artillery Brigade Flash (above) and author's artillery and 61 Mech insignia (right).

The aircraft was a SAFAIR C-130. [There were] Webbing seats, and our kit was stacked on the ramp and strapped. It must have some nice hydraulics because it managed to close with that weight on it. As we were flying, we got an opportunity to go in two's up to the flight deck. I must have been there somewhere over the Kalahari, judging from the trees.

WALVIS BAY - 61 MECHANIZED BATTALION GROUP

[On] First sight of Walvis Bay, most of the guys were disgusted, "They should have given this place to Namibia". It was sand everywhere. Potch airfield was neat and grassy, with neat grey painted metal gates; Rooikop had tarred pole gates, rusted wire, sand everywhere. We loaded our kit on a Kwevoel, and we had the luxury of being taken to the base in the PF's bus. Sand and little knee high bushes were everywhere, up to the horizon.

The base was quite neat, equipment was everywhere. We saw our guns standing under covers near the mess. All the *ou manne* were still there. They had only been at Walvis for a few weeks, being the last SADF unit to withdraw from Namibia. There were some tents for us. We were the first of the new groups to arrive.

We went through the normal administrative procedures to make sure no-one had disappeared.

The *ou manne* had their passing out parade. We had the honour of looking at it. Afterwards we were drilled back to the base. Our drilling was so good even the sergeant major was impressed.

In the army you became an old man when the new troops *klaared* in. For the infantry and other people, whose training was short, that meant every six

months. The Artillery, armour and, I believe, the sappers only had one intake a year, because the training took so long.

After the *ou manne* left we moved into the bungalows. We had two bungalows, and a few tents. After we were settled we were shuffled again with the different groups in different batteries. The gunners had one side and we, the drivers, signallers etc had the other side.

We were regrouped. There were two PF NCO's in the Battery, a bombardier and Sgt Strydom, who were the troop NCO's. Two of the bombardiers become gun number 1's, which didn't give them any satisfaction. The other gunners were very much rearranged, some number 1's losing their jobs, [and] the drivers were given their vehicles. For the first time there seemed to be enough equipment to go around.

Me, being one of the lucky guys, didn't get any vehicle, any responsiblities, and an officer I hadn't seen before and only talked to twice during the entire time [in Walvis Bay]. There were only two other OP Ratels, the other two being destroyed in Angola.

I spend most of my time in 45B, with Britz and van Dyk. The OP was Lt Swanepoel, the driver a new guy called Barnard. The other Ratel had Wessels, the signaller I can't remember and the OP a short Lieutenant from the Cape. Van Staden was in the Command Ratel.

We did some retraining, learning to do it the 61 way. Learning again to set up the goniometer and theodelites and going again through the procedures.

Just before Christmas day we had a buffet lunch in our hangar. The hangar was festooned with camouflage nets and all the PF's and their wives and children were there. There was also a speech or two. The next four days we had Rat packs, so that the chefs could "rest".

We got our first introduction to *"korvee dienste"*. That means helping out in the kitchen. I was to have my fill of that.

Our first guard duties also were a bit different. In Potch we did it infrequently. Here the Lance Bombardiers were responsible for handing out times which meant their friends got the choice times. There were three positions. Main gate, closest to the tarred road, north gate, closest to Rooikop airport, and the magazine.

We saw a lot of the magazine the first weeks. 61 Mech were one the last operational unit to leave South West Africa. For us, coming from training and its regulations, it was a shock to see all the ammo just lying around. I opened the Ratel's bin and there were six hand grenades rolling around without any protection.

All the Kwêvoels were still loaded with the shells. I do believe they left all the ammo there for the new intake. We had to offload it and store it in the building in the magazine. All the lot numbers in each store had to be the same and there could only be a certain amount of explosives per building. Since the shells were loaded mixed we had a lot of rearranging to do as well.

There were the normal green HE shells, [and] we saw our first propaganda shells. They were hollow and could be filled with leaflets. There were also some of the very first cluster ammunition shells for the G5's. They have never been used in combat. Lt Conradie told us when they first received

the shells, they decided to test them, without permission, to "validate the *skootstafels*[37]". They heard the shell explode, but couldn't see anything, and then the dust lifted behind them, where they weren't expecting it. There were repercussions about that and they even had to write a report for Pretoria.

After the Christmas break we moved the vehicles into the hangar.

Just after New Year Staff Sergeant Crafford was promoted, and become AOII Crafford.

The battery did their first deployment into the desert.

Training to shoot again, this time the 61 Mech way. As Lt Conradie said; "What is so difficult about it?" The TPO's Ratel uses its GPS to get the position, the guns pull in and 15 minutes later the battery's ready to fire.

There isn't even the problem with the equipment. In Angola all the equipment had to be removed from the guns because the bushes would rip it off, [whereas] in Walvis if it fell off everyone would see it.

We were moving ahead of the guns like always, getting to know the shooting range. In the West were the dunes, with Dune 7 as the Southern end, the South border was the Rooikop-Walvis road, with the warning signs that said sand. The North end was a row of rusted drums that was the Border with Namibia, and beyond that we could see Swakopmund. The East was another row of drums, going down again to the Walvis Road.

When we came to Walvis there was an UNTAG post at that border post, with the United Nations flag flying over it. We sometimes saw UNTAG troops in Walvis but we kept our distance. Once in a while a Huey would come flying over. We heard the *chop chop* for a long time and then this slow white helicopter came over.

The Meteorological Technical Assistants (Met TA's) joined us. They did their training at artillery school. They had a Kwêvoël with a container in the back with a dish to track weather balloons. It was never used.

Sergeant Major Crafford showed us one day how to destroy old gun charges. The cordite burned very impressively with a big whoosh. Part of the charge was a sheet of alumnium foil to prevent the copper from the shell sticking to the barrel. In Angola they stuck some of that foil onto a weather balloon and sent it up as a radar reflector. The Angolans took a few shots at it with the SAM's, showing the OP's exactly where they were.

In the middle of the shooting range there was a little black hill, imaginatively named *Swartkoppie*.[38] It was an old volcano. I saw a very big, black scorpion there; the scorpions in the rest of the desert were brown. We fortunately didn't see many.

We parked on that *koppie*, and it was there that we fired our first delayed action shells. We were looking forward to it, but it was a bit of a comedown. Just a small dust cloud as the shell exploded under the ground, and not much more.

The battery also did a small calibre training shoot. Britz and I were just offloaded at a point with a radio and told to stop everyone coming through. There was only a small wooden shelter, with place for sitting only. We didn't

[37] Shooting tables
[38] Afrikaans: Black hill.

know what to expect, and spent an entire night there with no sleeping bags or any equipment. It was absolutely freezing. By that time the radio battery was flat, and we could only receive, and not send. During the following morning an AO from one of the companies came through with two Kwevoels, coming to drop carwrecks on the shooting range. He said he knew where they were shooting and would keep away. Just as well because imagine what sort of shit I would have been in if a PF got hurt.

Later on everybody was well equipped for *baanpatrollie*, with bivvies and everything, because they knew what to expect. They also spend most of their time tanning.

So I missed another oppurtunity to see small caliber guns shoot. The other guys said it was a glorious shoot with all the weapons shooting. Even our Ratel 60 had a few shots. I would have loved to see that. I spend so many hours looking at it, and fiddling with it.

The entire Battalion was deployed in the desert at that time. I remember seeing a platoon of the company's Ratels going past with all the guys sitting on top, and I couldn't imagine how they would all fit inside.

There was a demonstration shoot for some civvies on the ridges to the south of *swartkoppie*. The Battalion's guys got to sit to one side, and all the sub-units gave a demo. The Olifant tank shot at a truck standing in the desert, when the dust settled, it looked like nothing had happened. The G5, [whose] number 1 was an English guy, Smit, shot two shots. They did a nice *bobaan* shoot, which seldom happened, with the barrel almost straight up. The charge couldn't have been very high, the flight time was only about forty seconds. The shells landed about five kilometres away. Between shots poor Smit had to drop the barrel flat with the handwheel, so that they could reload. I don't know why they didn't use the ram; it was probably not working. After the first shot, AO Crafford said, tea break, while we wait for the shell to land.

The civves were a group of schoolchildren, youth leaders. During the demonstration thay had a grandstand view from the back of the Olifant tank carrier, and afterwards a trip on the tank, ending with the trommel driving onto the carrier. They then each got a few shots with an R4 and an LMG.

One day in January there was an information session in the mess, when we were informed that National Service was shortened to one year and we, being in the transition phase, would be *klaaring* out end of July, after 18 months in the army. The guys from the August intake after us would be klaaring out in November, after 15 months. It seemed a bit unfair, but we didn't complain.

It was during a day in town in the beginning of February that I saw in an old Sunday newspaper that Nelson Mandela would be freed and the ANC unbanned. There was at no time any attempt by anyone to inform us about that happening, considering that at that stage our chief enemy was the ANC. Most of what I knew about that time was what I read after National Service was over.

It must have been about that time that I joined the *Koffiekroeg* (Coffee Bar). When I walked past the window I saw that they had a few bookcases full of books. Instant magnet, and I went to a meeting just to look at the books. It was fun, meeting guys from the other sub-units, because normally we didn't mix at all. There were even some of the Cape Corps troops there. [They had a]

Standard issue dartboard, the first time I learned to play darts, an urn and as much coffee as we could drink. It was much calmer, neater and nicer than the noise of the bungalow. There were normally about 20 guys there. I ended up spending a lot of time there.

The corporal in charge of the *Koffiekroeg* was a guy (Nickie) on voluntary extended National Service. I didn't know about it before, and also couldn't believe that anyone would be that stupid. He grew up in an orphanage, funnily enough with one of our gunner no 1's.

The PF chaplain was an oldish man, having been with the unit for quite a few years. The junior chaplain was a Lieutenant, Afrikaans speaking, from an English Baptist church. He was a nice soft sort of a chap, having an equally nice fiancee who moved to Walvis to be with him during his National Service. They got married shortly after *klaaring* out.

I don't know whose bright idea it was, but [eventually] all the nice books were packed and sent back to Pretoria. The only books allowed to remain were those with a religious theme. They sometimes seemed to think that just because they had given their hearts to Jesus their brains had to follow too.

Independence Day in Namibia was 21 March 1990. I even bought a few T-shirts in Walvis to commemorate it. The Commandant gave us a full four weeks leave during March, the two weeks leave, 4 days travel (we all were far enough from home to qualify for maximum), and the rest just because he was very nice, but mostly to make sure for political reasons that there were no South African troops in Walvis at that time.

There were a few SAFAIR aeroplanes taking everyone back. Cape Town was the first [destination] in a C-130. I do believe there were aeroplanes going to Bloemfontein and Durban, but I can't remember. We flew to Waterkloof with a Boeing 707, where my parents picked me up that night. And then [followed] a month of bliss.

The army magazine *Paratus* did an article about 61 Mech. They took pictures of all the equipment deployed in the desert. We saw the photographs, there were some beautiful ones. We could order pictures, and even had to pay up front. Of course nothing came of it. At least they gave us our money back. The article in *Paratus* was a waste. Only one picture of an Olifant standing still, and one of a sapper, working on the new canteen, ever appeared. That work stopped shorty afterwards and was never completed.

We flew back [home] in the same 707. The aircraft were overcrowded. Johnson, one of our chefs, turned up drunk, insulted the stewardess when he couldn't get a seat, and only arrived a week later with another flight. Fortunately for him he didn't get into any trouble.

One of the Bombardiers, we called him Kaloepie, drove back to Walvis in a Land Rover, with the aim of having a Safari through the Caprivi and Botswana after he *klaared* out. One of the other Bombadiers also had a car, an oldish Toyota I think, used to transport the junior leader to Walvis to get drunk. We had an encounter at the main gate with officers coming back drunk.

During the leave the first reports came through of the political violence in KwaZulu. It seemed to be rather messy. When we landed in Rooikop, Sierra Battery were volunteered to stay behind and load the 707 with ammo and equipment. It was the first we heard that parts of 61 were also moving down. As a political move, elements of 61 were sent to KwaZulu, so that the

government could say, look, we sent our chief operational unit down. A and B companies went, also with some of the support groups of the gunners. I stayed in Walvis, why, I don't know since my OP officer was sent down. The gunners who went were put in with the infantry, having a difficult time.

The new C squadron troops arrived as well. They had a sergeant major Sakkie de Beer. One of the tank number 1's also came to the coffee bar. He was Mike Smuts, [and] last time I heard of him he was a spokesman for the University of Pretoria. His father was a *dominee*, [and] he wanted to become one, and if he started to pray he could carry on for a hell of a long time.

Then started the rounds of *korvee* and guard duty. One week us, next week C Squadron. On and on and on. Sometimes things were confused and then there was guard and *korvee* at the same time and that had to be sorted out, since there were not enough people. Meanwhile all the normal work and cleaning had to be carried out as well. We started to reorganize the guard shifts. From two hours on, four off, we went to a four hours on eight off. It felt worse but at least we could do things.

I normally elected to stand guard at the main gate. There were not that many people anxious to be there, so I could choose my times, and there were lights, which meant I could read during my shift. I knew we were not allowed to read, but I did anyway.

One day I had to stand guard at the magazine. During the shift I was so bored I started to wander around. It must have been during the weekend since there was nobody at the offices. The little houses were all locked, but there were sandbag bunkers with the rounded tin roofs. In there, there were all sorts of weird hollow charges, and some ammunition. I even opened a box full of SAM-7 missiles. The box was still marked with Russian letters.

Earlier we loaded a few Kwêvoels full of outdated and strange ammunition. Why we had to do it I don't know, the sergeant major probably volunteered us. The sappers took it away and they destroyed it all in the desert. We weren't even allowed to watch. We just saw the big plume of dust and smoke.

There were also a few other guard places. In the military base in town we went a few times. Only the MP's had a few people there, and the military hospital was there, just a few temporary buildings. Further it was empty. There wasn't a naval presence anymore.

One night we went to the bunker next to the Rooikop-Walvis road. It was a heap of sand. The guards sleeping area was at the main gate. We had to walk along a long tunnel into the bunker, and rang the bells for the guard to open the door. He had a little armoured glass window. It was quite funny because you could hear someone walking in the tunnel from a long way off. Next to the door there was a shower for nuclear and chemical warfare, where you could shower if you were contaminated. The door was very thick, and could only be opened electrically. How far down the bunker went, I don't know. We were only allowed in the guard area. The rumour was an exaggerated seven stories, but I don't believe that. The guard duty was only during the night. There were people working there during daytime.

Next to the Northern gate was the signaller's encampment. It was off limits. I went there once with van Dyck. They had a steel roof with a few containers underneath, and a few very long antennas. They did eat out of our

kitchen, but we didn't know how many were there. Once there was a black guy in the coffee bar, he was an Ovambo, and could speak quite a lot of languges. Quite a few others were Portuguese speakers.

It was about that time we started working on the 61 Mech memorial next to the entrance road. The granite we got from a quarry, south of the Walvis road. Lt Swanepeol was in charge. Van Staden, Britz, me, two sappers, and a medic. The base was the Castle, with granite walls build up to about knee height. The granite obelisk was glued to the middle. I'm sad to say it wasn't finished when we left. The sappers dug two holes for palm trees in front. They only got to about knee depth when they hit hard surface. The rest of the holes were dug by the builder's machine.

On the left of the main road we build a wall of granite boulders. The Kwêvoels brought in a lot of sand from south of Walvis, and the grass from somewhere. L/Bdr Hendricks made it his baby. He spent hours watering the grass to make sure it grew.

The new messes and bungalows were almost finished by the time we left. The new kitchen's structure was put up, but the walls and the floor were not even started. I borrowed a wheelbarrow and stole some bricks and gravel and built a new soakpit in front of the kitchen back door. It looked better afterwards.

The main chef was an AOII from the Cape Corps. He was quite nice. We had all sorts of liberties in the kitchen on *korvee*, making food for ourselves. One morning before six, we raided a few hotboxes full of bacon and eggs standing there. He was very upset because it was for something special. A few of the officers also came through the kitchen that morning, so we just blamed them.

I once helped van Dyk in the officers' mess. It was on a little hill to the south of the base. The officers had a bar there. In the beginning the NCO's had a mess just to the south, but that became the lance corporals' and bombardiers' mess, and the NCO's joined the officers. Quite upmarket, with tablecloths and everything.

It must have been about the middle of July that the guys from Kwazulu started to come back. They were all given the little 61 Mech knife to show they had been operational. We were quite jealous. They had some hair-raising experiences, if we could believe them. One of the guys had been shot in the leg during a raid on a hostel. Gert was sitting on a Casspir when he was almost decapitated by a wire spanned across the road just for that. They picked up a lot of dead bodies. Breaking up bands of troublemakers with shock grenades and teargas. I was also told that there were interrogations inside Casspirs by the Zulu speaking troops that turned out to be very illegal.

We had our passing out parade the Friday before we left. Of course there were almost no parents there, being a bit out of the way. Commandant Muller congratulated us, on being the first 61 group ever that didn't have a single casualty. At the end of the parade all the other sub units threw up their berets, cheered and walked into the base. We were formed up by Crafford and marched back to Battery HQ. The other troops went for the kitchen and raided it. Some called the AOII a *kaffir* when he tried to stop them. [This led to] Big trouble, [and] there was a identification parade in front of Battalion HQ, [where] the sergeant major picked out a few culprits and they were charged.

Later that afternoon there were major *opfoks* ordered by the Commandant. We just had a nice run to the Walvis road and back, because we weren't involved.

The kitchen was locked, and we were issued with rat packs for the remaining time. We had to empty the bungalow for the roofies, and moved into the hangar. There was trouble about that as well. Lt Conradie made us empty all the dustbins and salvage out all the equipment that the guys threw out. There was everything from rifle magazines to *pikstelle* and webbing.

The remnants of a rat pack. The author brought it home with him. The back tin was meatballs and spaghetti, and has since rusted through, and the meat balls are like marbles.

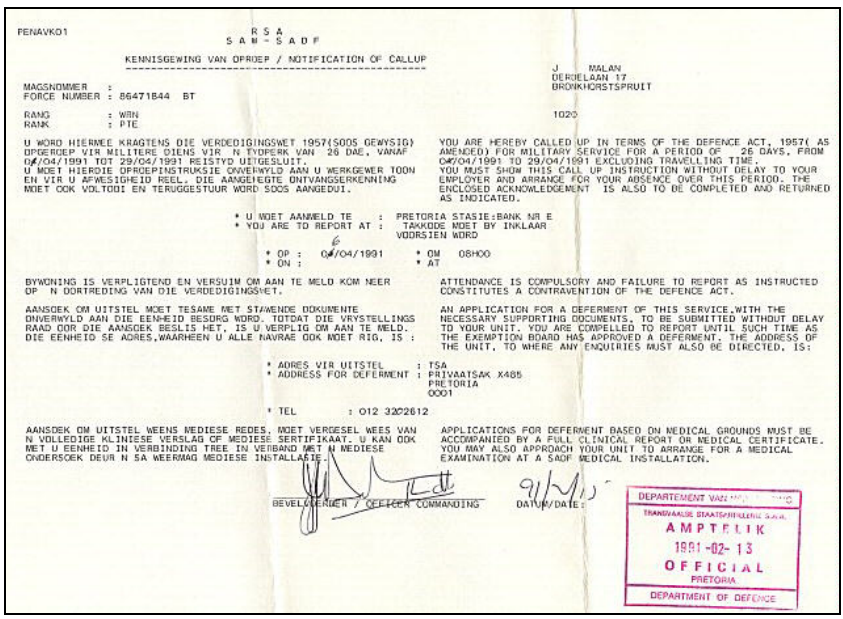
Our guns were handed back, just disassembled. The tiffie assembled it to make sure everything was there, checked the number, and we were free. I never shot that gun, or even took the sights apart to clean it. I feel sorry for the guy that got it after me.

The last things we handed back were our sleeping bags, just before we left the base. I flew back on the Monday, I think we were the last to leave. Durban and Cape Town left [on] the weekend. First we were going to fly with the 707 again, but there was trouble and they sent two C-130's. Everybody was upset, because the second flight would only be a few hours later, and they were looking for volunteers. I was from Bronkhorstspruit, so qualified for the first one. It was only then that I learned the Met TA Claassen, who was sitting next to me, was also from BHS. The guys from Pretoria were put on the later flight, because they were closer to Waterkloof. My parents picked me up at Waterkloof. As usual they were unable to tell them what time we were arriving, and that there was trouble. They were just about to leave when my flight came in.

AFTERWARDS

I didn't keep contact with anyone. Marais I saw once after the army. I saw two of the junior leaders afterwards, just greeting them, one pushing a babycarriage. The "*Klein groen mannetjie*" I saw at a cadet competition a year or two later. Sergeant Major Crafford I read about in the newspaper, he was the sergeant major at 4 Artillery Regiment training the first black mortar battery for the Paratroops. I saw him also at a Defence exposition in '98, explaining the G5 to visitors. He was a captain then.

As for me, I went from bad to worse. I didn't do a single camp. I got a letter at university and applied for exemption, and got it. I was supposed to be in the *Transvaalse Staatsartillerie*. In 1996 I was informed that the regiment would be changing from G5's to the Bateleur. There also would be a two-week exercise in Lohatla. The entire Citizen force system collapsed from then on. I am still at the same address, but haven't received a letter from them since.



PENAVKO1

R S A
S A N - S A D F

KENNISGEWING VAN OPROEP / NOTIFICATION OF CALLUP

J MALAN
DERIELAAN 17
BRONKHORSTSPRUIT

MAGSNOMMER :
FORCE NUMBER : 86471844 BT

RANG : WRN
RANK : PTE

1020

U WORD HIERMEE KRAGTENS DIE VERDEDIGINGSWET 1957(SOOS GEWYSIG) OPGEROEP VIR MILITERE DIENS VIR N TYDPERK VAN 26 DAE, VANAF 04/04/1991 TOT 29/04/1991 REISTYD UITGESLUIT. U MOET HIERDIE OPROEPINSTRUKSIE ONVERWYLD AAN U WERKGEWER TOON EN VIR U AFWESIGHEID REEL. DIE AANGEHEGTE ONTVANGSERKENNING MOET OOK VOLTOOI EN TERUGGESTUUR WORD SOOS AANGEDUI.

YOU ARE HEREBY CALLED UP IN TERMS OF THE DEFENCE ACT, 1957(AS AMENDED) FOR MILITARY SERVICE FOR A PERIOD OF 26 DAYS, FROM 04/04/1991 TO 29/04/1991 EXCLUDING TRAVELLING TIME. YOU MUST SHOW THIS CALL UP INSTRUCTION WITHOUT DELAY TO YOUR EMPLOYER AND ARRANGE FOR YOUR ABSENCE OVER THIS PERIOD. THE ENCLOSED ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IS ALSO TO BE COMPLETED AND RETURNED AS INDICATED.

* U MOET AANMELD TE : PRETORIA STASIE:BANK NR E
* YOU ARE TO REPORT AT : TAKKODE MOET BY INKLAAR VOORSIEN WORD

* OP : 04/04/1991 * OM 08H00
* ON : * AT

BYWONING IS VERPLIGTEND EN VERSUIM OM AAN TE MELD KOM NEER OP N DORTREDING VAN DIE VERDEDIGINGSWET.

ATTENDANCE IS COMPULSORY AND FAILURE TO REPORT AS INSTRUCTED CONSTITUTES A CONTRAVENTION OF THE DEFENCE ACT.

AANSOEK OM UITSTEL MOET TESAME MET STAWENDE DOKUMENTE ONVERWYLD AAN DIE EENHEID BESORG WORD. TOTDAT DIE VRYSTELLINGS RAAD OOR DIE AANSOEK BESLIS HET, IS U VERPLIG OM AAN TE MELD. DIE EENHEID SE ADRES,WAARHEEN U ALLE NAVRAE OOK MOET RIG, IS :

AN APPLICATION FOR A DEFERMENT OF THIS SERVICE,WITH THE NECESSARY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS, TO BE SUBMITTED WITHOUT DELAY TO YOUR UNIT. YOU ARE COMPELLED TO REPORT UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE EXEMPTION BOARD HAS APPROVED A DEFERMENT. THE ADDRESS OF THE UNIT, TO WHERE ANY ENQUIRIES MUST ALSO BE DIRECTED, IS:

* ADRES VIR UITSTEL : TSA
* ADDRESS FOR DEFERMENT : PRIVAATSAK X485
PRETORIA
0001

* TEL : 012 3202612

AANSOEK OM UITSTEL WEENS MEDIESE REDES, MOET VERGESEL WEES VAN N VOLLEDIGE KLINIESE VERSLAG OF MEDIESE SERTIFIKAAT. U KAN OOK MET U EENHEID IN VERBINDING TREE IN VERBAND MET N MEDIESE ONDERSOEK DEUR N SA WEERMAG MEDIESE INSTALLASIE.

APPLICATIONS FOR DEFERMENT BASED ON MEDICAL GROUNDS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A FULL CLINICAL REPORT OR MEDICAL CERTIFICATE. YOU MAY ALSO APPROACH YOUR UNIT TO ARRANGE FOR A MEDICAL EXAMINATION AT A SADF MEDICAL INSTALLATION.

BEVELVOERDER / CEFIGER COMMANDING

DATUM/DATE: 91/MU

DEPARTEMENT VAN [illegible]
TRANSVAALSE STAATSARTILLERIE SAUK.
AMPTELIK
1991-02-13
OFFICIAL
PRETORIA
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

The author's only camp call up, to the Transvaal State Artillery, in 1991.

Did I enjoy it? It is difficult to say. Like all troops I just waited to get it over with. I did learn a lot, [and] we had some fun times. I can even say I enjoyed it much more than school. My biggest regret was that I didn't go to the Border. I had the right training, was in the right units, but [was] just too late.

APPENDIX

5 SOUTH AFRICAN INFANTRY BATTALION 1976

CHARLIE COMPANY

From *ARMED FORCES*, December 1976, p 14-17.

Dear Editor,

When last did you visit 5 S.A.I. in Ladysmith? I can guarantee you if you visited us for 2 days you'd have enough information to write a whole book.

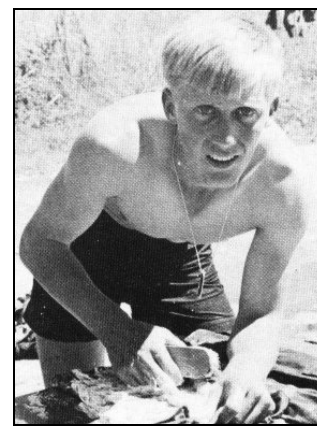
We are South Africa's elite Infantry Batallion, and that can be proved. Take for example the C Company, when they walk around the camp in their spare time (although they don't get much, they're too busy training) the other companies run away and hide.

So Mr. Editor, if you want a good story for your magazine '*Armed Forces*', come around to 5 S.A.I. and you won't believe how much one can learn in a day. I'll be looking out for you.

ANON,

(I might get pole P.T. if I mention my name.)

A Section Leader asks a question during field exercises.

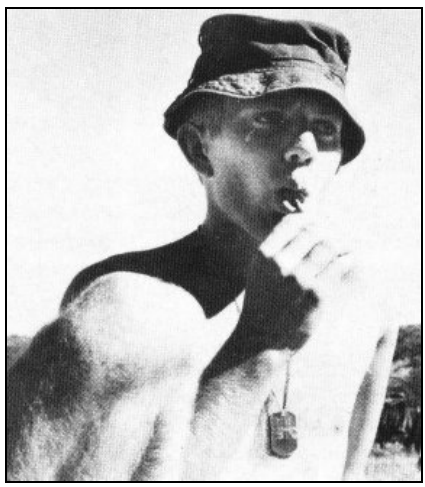


The scrubbing brush has always been the smart soldier's friend.

Many military formations may think that they are good. But there cannot be too many that would have a Rifleman amongst their members who would take the time and trouble to write a letter such as we carry in the box on this page, unless they are highly motivated and have a high standard of morale.

After receiving the letter, arrangements were made to pay a visit to C Company 5 South African Infantry to let them have the opportunity of proving their claim. Charlie Company is a normal Infantry Company, that was completing its training before leaving for the operational area and I was able to `join up' with them for a few days to see how they worked, talked and played (although there was not much of the latter).

Basically, this Company is made up of men who are doing a 12 month period of training but at this early stage they are already finding a high percentage of men who are volunteering for the extended periods of 18 and 24 months.



Sweet tooth.

A Rifleman from Swellendam takes the chance to cool-off. At Ladysmith even clothes washing can be hot work.

It is very difficult to assess one Company against another during a short period of time. It is rather like the First Class School passers, who so often fade away once they have to face the reality of life and the 'doing it by the book' is behind them for life. But, any Company that is better than Charlie, will indeed have to be very good!

Ready, Able and Willing. One of the Platoon leaders of Charlie Company with his Platoon.

'Anon'. The writer of the letter who comes from Johannesburg. 'Anon' whose father was a pilot in the Royal Air Force is the only Jewish member of Charlie Company; he has volunteered for an extended period of Military Service. On arrival at Ladysmith the letter writer could not be found for 'Anon' was missing from the Company parade as he was playing cricket for his Battalion. Incidentally, there was no 'pole P.T.' but there was an extra pass for an evening to eat out in Ladysmith.

I think what impressed me most about Charlie Company was one of the first things that I found out about the Company. On the Saturday morning that I arrived at Ladysmith, the Company Commander called the company together so that we could meet each other and I could ask questions. The tables were turned however, and it was the company that started asking me questions and it was this that impressed me. All too often young men, and

specially young men in uniform, are reluctant to come forward and ask a stranger questions, even more so when their Commander and Officers and N.C.O.'s are present. The questions covered a variety of subjects and showed that these Rifleman had been thinking and discussing, amongst themselves, points that were not too clear to them and it became obvious that only a fool would try to pull the wool over their eyes.

Part of a Section moves fast across open country at one of the training used by the Battalion near Ladysmith. The platoon of which this section forms part had been travelling in convoy which had run into an ambush and these Riflemen with the heavy weapon were doing a flanking movement.

I asked the Company Officers to explain this open approach from their men and they gave me a very simple explanation. "You see, in this Company we are all one big family". This may be one of the contributing factors as to why there have been no men A.W.O.L. since the Company came into being six months ago and why, according to the Company, it has the best spirit, the best morale and the best motivation. Another factor is that Charlie Company, like most of our other training units, is now being able to benefit from the use of men as Instructors, who have completed a number of tours of duty in the operational area.

Unlike most other Companies in our Army, the whole of Charlie is quartered under one roof in a large hangar and it is here that they live and eat together. The centre area is used for messing and various indoor games, together with the boxing gloves that are used to settle disputes! And if there are any disputes concerning Charlie Company's claim, this might be the best manner in which to settle the matter.

We would like to think that Charlie Company is a typical South African Infantry Company and hope that these photographs will give some idea of how an Infantry Company trains and lives.

The Company Commander with one of his Platoon Leaders instructing his men on ambush and mine drill in the training area. All the Instructors with Charlie Company have had at least one tour of duty in the Operational Area and in some case four or more periods. The stick on the back of the sitting in front is used for mine probing. The stick is the internationally accepted means of finding mines by small formations that are not able, for operational reasons, to encumber themselves with the conventional types of mine detectors usually used by the Sappers. Very often probing is done with a bayonet but this is tiring and dangerous as the probers are in a poor position for quick reaction.

The training has to be tough and realistic and this Rifleman is shown what not to do. In many instances I have found that it is the recruits who would like to step up the pace of the training without regard to safety factors. With Charlie Company there was never any shortage of volunteers for this aspect of their training.

The members of Charlie Company rejected any suggestion that they would prefer to be split up and placed in the conventional type of Army bungalow. This photograph shows the inside of the house of `The Family' and was taken just before Sunday dinner was served in the centre area which was used for feeding and relaxation.